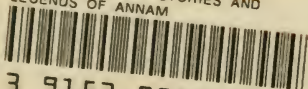


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CHIVAS-BARON # STORIES AND
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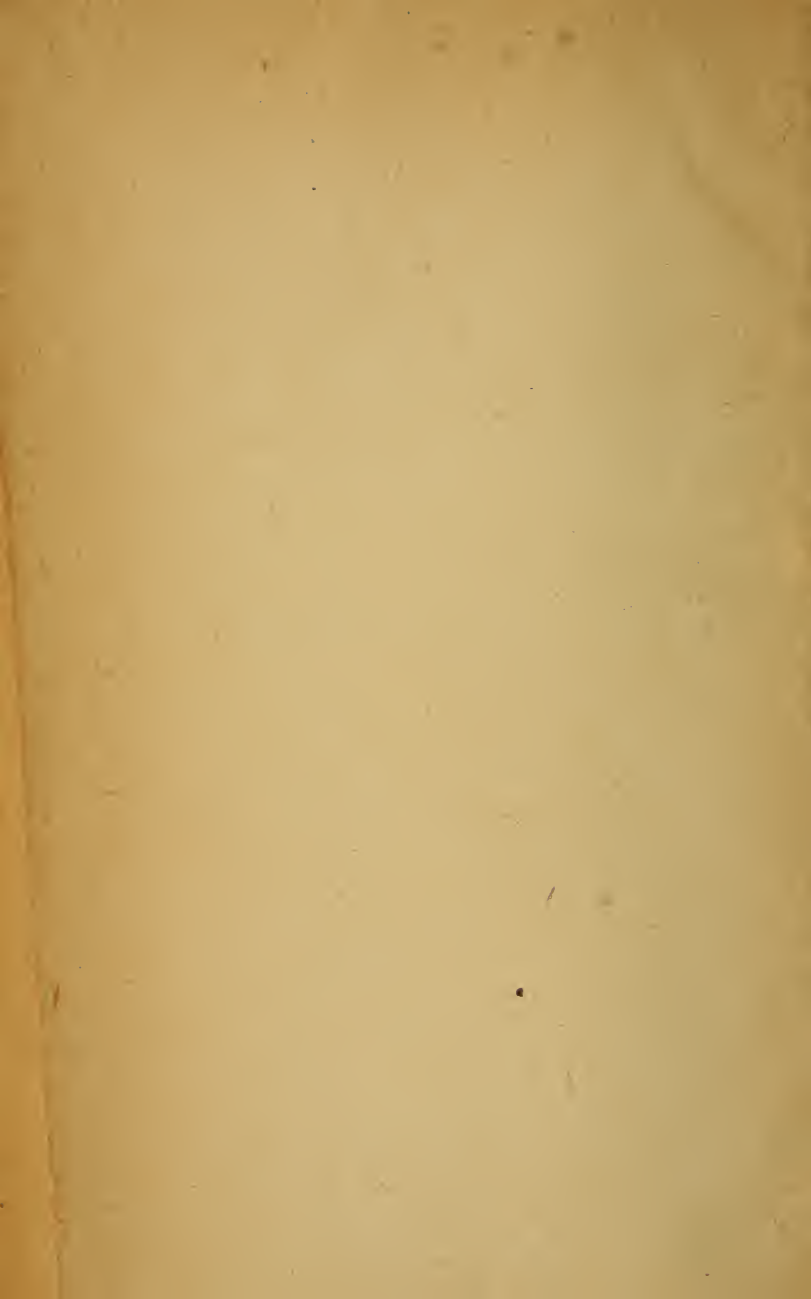


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Stories and Legends of Annam





A genie, who passed that way, was moved by her misery. —p.219.

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Stories and Legends of Annam

By Cl. Chivas-Baron

Translated from the French *Contes et Légendes de l'Annam*
by E. M. Smith-Dampier

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	vii
I. THE WATER-GENIE	1
II. THE TREASURE OF THE CHAM CHIEFTAIN .	9
III. THE DEATH OF MY LORD TIGER. .	19
IV. IN THE DRAGON KINGDOM	27
V. THE BETEL AND THE ARECA-TREE .	37
VI. SONGS OF BLIND MEN	53
VII. THE MARKET OF PHÙ-CAM	57
VIII. THE CROW AND THE PEACOCK . .	61
IX. THE DAUGHTER OF KING MINH-TONG .	65
X. THE GENIE OF THE TAN-VIEN . . .	69
XI. THE TAILOR OF HUÉ	71
XII. THE BLIND MAN	75
XIII. HISTORY OF KING TRIÊU-VIÊT . .	79
XIV. THE RICE-GENIE (ÔNG-LUA) . . .	83
XV. THE FAMILY	87

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Contents

	PAGE
XVI. THE ROCK OF VONG-PHÙ	91
XVII. THE BAMBOO	95
XVIII. THE RIVAL GENII	99
XIX. SONG ON THE DEATH OF A YOUNG MAIDEN	105
XX. HONG-LO THE GIANT	109
XXI. BA THE BUFFALO-HERD	123
XXII. THSING-KOU	133
XXIII. TEA	153
XXIV. THE SENSITIVE PLANT	163
XXV. THE MOON-STONE	175
XXVI. THE PEARL	191
XXVII. THE ORCHID	209
XXVIII. THE POOL OF PICE	221
XXIX. SOUSSYAMA	233
XXX. THEY WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY	243
XXXI. THE CITIZEN OF CU-LAC	249

INTRODUCTION

ANNAM is the land of legends. Always poetic, often tragic, these legends are in perfect harmony with the strange, sanguinary soil, the outlandish vegetation, the air saturated with perfume, and the aerial sounds of the sacred musical instruments, singing, in the purple dawn, the praises of almighty Buddha.

The religions of Buddha, Confucius, and Tao, a heterogeneous collection which make up the dogmas of his faith, are not sufficiently complicated for the Annamite.

To the beliefs recognized by the bonzes are united the most unexpected, most original superstitions, transmitted from one generation to another by a tradition stronger and more deeply rooted in men's minds

Introduction

than all the laws and commandments written in the sacred books.

The Genii, the Ma, are everywhere.

Benevolent or ferocious, they are hidden in the calm rivers, the dangerous torrents, in the sea, under the mountain, or in the heart of the forest.

Each tree, each plant, conceals a god. Is the tree useful? The Ma is good. Is the plant poisonous? The Ma is evil.

The Ma-Ra, or Ma-Da (Water Genii) are of capricious temper. Anything may be feared from their wrath.

The Ma-Xo (Mountain Genii) hold or let loose the thunder. The Ma-Loan (Frightful Monsters) spread epidemics, and the Ma-Troi (Will o' the Wisps) cause fear after nightfall.

The lesser genii, moreover, frequently take animal form.

My Lord the Tiger is something of a god. He is respected as much as feared. When dead, he yet causes death; for from

Introduction

his claws, his whiskers, and his slaver, are born animal poisons, of which the sorcerers make great use. One little bone alone, the Way-khai, found in My Lord's shoulder, brings good luck.

The elephant is the great Mandarin, the "gentleman who knows everything."

The whale is a good soul; and on the beach may be found the Nghé-miêu, little pagodas dedicated to the "lady-fish," in honour of the fortunate spot where her body was driven ashore.

Familiar spirits exist, household gods ready to make themselves useful . . . or to try the patience of the house-mistress. Such are the rat, the ant (gentleman with supernatural powers), the extraordinary *margouillat*, a tiny transparent lizard, the buddha-serpent, etc.

Some beasts are frankly fabulous; the *thông-công*, the dragon who dwells in the lagoons, or walks, in the clear dawn, on the great marble peaks. He can only

Introduction

be seen by those guilty of some crime, to whom he announces the approach of celestial vengeance.

The con-ngoc, the pearl-animal, assures his possessor of perfect felicity.

The appearance of a pair of phoenixes, birds wonderful as rare, presages precious fidelity in marriage.

Lastly, besides the Ma and the dragons, everyone knows the con-tinh, a redoubtable feminine genie.

When nights are dense, without starlight, the con-tinh dance a dishevelled sarabande; and woe betide the heedless mortal whom they entwine in their hellish rounds!

All these genii, good and evil, are only lesser spirits. It would be unseemly to confuse them with the "Thân," the greater genii, essentially benevolent, or, above all, with the great, the sacred Dragon, whose gigantic body sustains the whole land of Annam.

Introduction

His heart is at Hué, the capital, and his members stretch from High Tonkin to Low Cochin-China.

Here and there, in river-beds or hollow vales, these sacred members are almost on the surface of the soil. Care must then be taken not to dig the earth too deeply; the Dragon might be injured, and grave catastrophes caused.

Cáo-Biên, the legendary General, having used thunder to rout his foes,¹ broke thus one of the most holy Dragon's veins, and the blood then shed stained for all time the waters of the Red River.

The sacred Dragon is the symbol of virtue, courage, power, and honour.

With so many subjects at hand, one can scarcely be surprised at the number and diversity of the fantastic tales passed on from age to age by the old men, re-told

¹ Thus is explained the appearance of gunpowder in a battle, about 370, during the reign of the Emperor Am-Tong of the Chinese dynasty of the Duong.

Introduction

and embellished by the blind, the rustic bards, ever listened to, ever believed.

All who have best known—and best loved—Annam, have felt the mystic poetry of these gracious tales.

J. Boissière points out their significance and “inevitability.”

“The Annamite,” he writes,¹ “never dreams of repudiating those vague beliefs which form part of his family tradition. . . . Why with the microscope of scepticism examine these dreams which, at certain times, so well fulfil their function as comforters and enchanters?”

“Why reject these legends where heroes, genii, learned men, and gracious princesses are to be found?”

“Why, like a naughty boy breaking his plaything, destroy these pretexts for tale-telling during vigils and dreamy hours?”

“Never have they been weapons in

¹ *L'Indo-chine avec les Français.*

Introduction

fanatical hands. Never have they done anyone harm."

The erudite professor, M. G. Dumoutier, has translated the pagoda inscriptions, and collected the great historical legends. Pasquier, in his short sketch of Annamite literature, mentions certain miraculous tales. M. de Pouvourville (*Rimes Chinoises*) has sung many antique heroes. M. J. Ajalbert shows a wise and witty understanding of the Far-Eastern story-teller. The Rev. Father Cadière has collected the popular superstitions of the Nguôn-Son Valley and of the Quang-Tri. Emile Nolly quotes exquisitely from the *Luc-Van-Giên* (a celebrated Annamite poem), and the Chuyên-doi-Xua (Tales of Old Times).

.

Often, in the bush, when twilight had cooled the air scented with the breath of wild lilac or frangipani, we would settle down beneath the straw-thatched verandah.

Phù-Io, our "boy," a big fellow some

Introduction

thirty years old, simple as a child, credulous like every good Annamite, would bring us the news of the day, adding that touch of the marvellous so dear to the Oriental imagination.

Sometimes, too, when the chances of travel had led us to a pagoda, a ruin, or one of those *faërie* landscapes frequently found in Indo-China, Phù-Lo would relate to us the memories associated with those stones, those trees, that water, that space of sky; the familiar legends of Annam.

The more complex, terrible, or mysterious among the historical legends are left—if I may so express it—to the bonzes and learned men, and reach the people only by means of long rhythmical complaints, chanted slowly, in doleful tones, by poets, blind men, singing girls, and actors.

Certain historical and classical legends must, however, be excepted; they are better known because more frequently repeated and heard.

Introduction

Such, for example, is the legend of Ong-thân-giong,¹ “babe sleeping in his cradle,” who grew up all of a sudden under the eyes of a hostile king, seized a sword, sprang on a horse, rushed into the fray, and drove away the “foreigners.”

Such is the legend of the “Two Sacred Ladies,” the Trung sisters, who freed their country from the Chinese yoke, and “revived” it by wise legislation. This divine mission accomplished, the souls of the Ladies ascended “voluntarily” to heaven, the realm of the heroes and greater genii, while their bodies, borne away by the docile and “respectful” river, paused at the exact spot where they wished to be honoured.

There is, again, the tale of Quang-Su, the wise bonze who cured a king’s madness, and crossed the sea on his hat to seek “all the copper in China,” with which he cast

¹ This may possibly refer to the second incarnation of Huyen-Dé, the genie Tran-Vu spoken of by M. Dumoutier.

Introduction

a bell; and its enchanting sound attracted the golden buffalo which enriched the Emperor of Annam.

Sitting up o' nights, while the smoky lamps cast an uncertain light on the threshold of the cai-nhas (little houses), the old folks tell of the self-sacrifice of good King Ly; the crimes and debaucheries of Oai-muc, the "sorrowful king"; the might of the terrible Tartar Kou-biläi, son of Ghengis-Khan, might broken by Lê-Loi, beloved of the genii. They repeat the most glorious episodes of ancient warfare and bloody combats with the Tay-Son.

Every tale is amplified and complicated—sometimes completely disfigured—by the constant intervention of the god-genii, of Sakya-Muni, of the great buddha Huyen-Dé, or the Emperor of Jade, Ngoc-Hoang.

The Annamite, having no very definite beliefs, accepts the most contradictory legends in the same spirit of—superficial—

Introduction

faith, attracted only by the “marvellous,” which entertains and instructs him.

“It is possible,” he says cheerfully, “to understand heavenly matters in different ways, without ceasing to be an honest man.”

My boy once explained this religious tolerance—I was going to say “indifference”—by an ingenious comparison :

“Once upon a time, Lao-Tseu opened the *Tao-teu-Kinh* (Book of Reason) before three of his disciples, placed at a yard’s distance, and bade them decipher the sacred characters.

“The first saw only the most accentuated brush-marks ; the second—a priest—read the entire text ; while the third, who was short-sighted, perceived but ‘black and white.’

“Thus it is with the matters of Up Above ; each man sees them with his soul as he sees the characters with his eyes ; the purblind reads not as the priest, the

Introduction

ignorant understands not as the lettered. And," added Phù-Io, "the 'Tao, the Sage, is pleased all the same!"

The humble Annamite allows to the book-learned a higher, more enlightened religion, superior to his own;¹ but he realizes that this religion is not for an ignorant man like him. He remains faithful to the legends, which frequently, for him, take the place of moral precepts.

Since the historical legends have been, for the most part, already collected, I have here endeavoured, quite simply, to reproduce some among the popular beliefs of our yellow brethren. I hope that my "barbarous French" may not convey too inaccurately the picturesque flavour of the language used by my boy, Phù-Io.

¹ The Dao-nho, who has his Chinese equivalent in the Jou-Kéao.

STORIES AND LEGENDS OF ANNAM

I

THE WATER-GENIE

I

CLOSE by the banks of the Song-Lo are huddled the wretched thatched roofs of a little Annamite village. It is Ban-Han.

Every morning, before the sun reddened the horizon, and often again at eve, when the sky was streaked with long bands of purple and gold, Kâm-Kông would go down the principal village-street, the muddy street defiled with betel, encumbered with children, pigs, and poultry.

She went with elastic, somewhat cat-like steps, along the path bordered with cactus

The Water-Genie

which winds down to the river. A bamboo on her shoulder sustained the two brown earthen pots wherein the young *congaie* was wont to draw water.

Kâm-Kông was glad to be alive. She sang in soft tones the *Li-ou-li-ou-sai*.¹

Her white *cai-âo*² fluttered behind her to the rhythm of her lightsome pace. Her feet, arched and bare, scarce touched the earth. Now and then they struck a pebble, which, set a-rolling, ran down the bank, and fell into the water with crystalline "plop."

After following the river a while, Kâm-Kông came to a little cove, where the grey leaden waters of the Song-Lo grew clearer, more limpid, almost blue.

Tall, slender bamboos mirrored themselves with delight in that lovely looking-glass. Reeds rustled, and grasshoppers sang.

Kâm-Kông set down her water-pots,

¹ Song of the Annamite boatmen.

² White tunic worn both by men and women.

The Water-Genie

admired herself awhile in the pearly wave, then raising her trousers from her straight ankles, she went down into the river, and made her toilette with the coquettish movements of a kitten.

She unfastened her long locks, shook them out in the sun, and twisted them into a close and heavy knot.

Kâm-Kông came regretfully forth from the river. The water was so sweet to her slender form ! For a long minute the young girl gazed into the azure depths.

The far-off complaint of a blind man was heard . . . and the shrill call of an angry woman. Kâm-Kông recognized her mother's voice.

Hastily she filled her water-pots ; and, after a last look at the alluring stream, the little *congaie* went up the steep bank once more.

II

That very evening, beneath her long

The Water-Genie

thatched roof, the *ba-gia* (old woman), having thrown away her betel-quid, told a very fine story.

To astonished children, laughing maidens, and sceptical youths, she declared that there lived in the Song-Lo a genie beautiful as the sun.

This all-powerful genie dwelt in dripping caverns, decked with dazzling jewel-work, at the bottom of the river. He commanded a whole army of sea-monsters and dragons, who, like their master, were now very good, and now very evil.

Was it not this cruel genie who capsized, only last month, Phù-Binh's sampan? Was it not he again, who yesterday filled the nets of that same Phù-Binh with fish in such quantity that five men had to help draw them from the river?

And that was a mere nothing! In the old Emperor's time, most amazing things had been seen and known. . . . Tradition, besides, preserved the names of pretty

The Water-Genie

maids who had vanished under water, desired and possessed by the amorous genie.

All this the old woman related with sweeping, tragical gestures, and cabalistic puckerings of the brows. She ended with counsel never to tempt, never exasperate, the genie of the Song-Lo.

Kâm-Kông paid devout attention to the *ba-gia*. Dreamily she went her way, and took her water-pots for the accustomed task. Her step was less purposeful than its wont, and she sang no longer.

Dim murmurings, well-nigh whispers, seemed to sound amid the banyans. Lights winked behind the growing hedges.

The sky darkened swiftly; night was come. Shadows thickened around the young *congaïe*. . . . The monotonous song of a boatman rose for a moment above all the night-noises. The click of oars accompanied and lent rhythm to the wild melody, which started on a long, piercing note, and

The Water-Genie

died away in a series of solemn sounds, filled with sobs.

A stronger breath of the evening breeze rattled the hard bamboo-stems, and traced weird wrinkles on the surface of the river.

Kâm-Kông was frightened. Amid the strange eddies, she seemed to see the diabolical faces of dragons.

But all at once the huge disk of the moon rose behind the hill, and silvered the flood with such a splendour that Kâm-Kông forgot alike her alarm, the *ba-gia's* ridiculous tales, the filling of her water-pots, and her mother's probable wrath.

Rather timid still, she went down softly into the river; her slender fingers strayed on the liquid surface, tracing capricious furrows. . . .

The maiden now moved gently as a mother who fears to wake her sleeping babe. . . : Might she not displease the Ma by bathing at so late an hour?

But the heat had been so overwhelming

The Water-Genie

that day, the sun so sultry ! . . . and the water must be so pleasant !

Kâm-Kông, hesitating, dipped first one foot, then the other. . . . How alluring was the wave's cooling caress ! How sparkling that sheet of silver !

Every star now lit an emerald or a diamond in that silent, moving surface. . . . Was it indeed the marvellous dwelling of the genie beautiful as the sun ?

Then Kâm-Kông hesitated no longer. She unfastened her *cai-áo*, loosed her girdle, and let her garment fall.

Slender, naked, white in the moonbeams, she wondered awhile at the iridescence of the waves ; then went on, sinking little by little into the soft, voluptuous waters.

A shiver crept through her from neck to hips. . . . Kâm-Kông lay back, swooning and languorous. . . . Confused singing hummed in her ears, an exquisite dream-music. . . .

All at once, a sublime vision, amid a

The Water-Genie

magical glimmering, a splendid and beautiful Being held out his arms towards her. . . .

III

Although seven or eight generations have gone by, the maidens laugh no more at eve when the old women or blind men speak of the river-god hidden in the depths of the Song-Lo.

They go far aside sooner than pass alone by the banks of the alluring stream.

They know only too well that Kâm-Kông, whose garments and water-pots were found, but whose body was never seen again, Kâm-Kông the fair, Kâm-Kông the rash, was desired and seized by the Water-Genie.

*(Legend gathered at Ban-Han
in the region of the Thays.)*

II

THE TREASURE OF THE CHAM CHIEFTAIN

I

FROM the lugubrious landscape exhaled
a poignant sadness.

'Twas a grey night, unillumined by stars,
but not opaque. '

Beyond its deep moats, filled with muddy
water, the Citadel of Cao-Lao raised its
black walls in a line that hid the horizon.

By the near side, crouched on his heels,
his chin in his hands, Nhanh sat dreaming.

Nhanh dreamt not of love ; he despised
women ; women felt for him unconquerable
aversion.

And yet Nhanh was young, built like a
Hercules ; but his narrow eyes were so
false and oblique, his jaw so prominent,
his nose so hideously crushed in, that he

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

rather resembled one of the cat-tribe than a human being. He was terrifying to behold.

In the vast night-silence, broken only by the cry of birds of prey, Nhanh, motionless, pondered how to seize the wealth of the Cham Chieftain.

He knew every detail of the royal burial. He knew that, having crossed the moats and climbed the walls, he would find himself near to the sepulchre.

He knew that with the ancient monarch was buried his treasure—a fabulous treasure.

Neither was Nhanh ignorant of the legend; how, ere they continued their conquering march, in order to guard their Chief and his riches, the Chams had buried four living warriors hard by their dead master.

North, south, east, and west, the Chief was guarded by his slaves . . . and that from age to age.

At the recollection, a grinning smile

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

passed over the man's coarse lips. Nhanh held, with some reason, that the four warriors had long been in no state to defend their Chief, and that all he had to fear was a fight with spectres.

Ghosts had no terrors for Nhanh. The difficulty—and that a prodigious one—was to enter the Citadel, to force the door of the tomb, or pierce through its walls.

There was a triple climb to dare, a double plunge to take in fetid, miry waters, said to be peopled with reptiles.

Nhanh had made himself familiar with every crack, every cranny, every roughness of the wall. . . . He was agile as an ape.

Dared he attempt so hazardous an adventure ?

Were he taken in the act, it would mean death, preceded by fearful tortures. . . . But then only to think that this treasure, this fairy treasure, might be his own !—that he, Nhanh the beggar, might be rich—rich

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

enough to rouse the envy of a Mandarin with three claws ! . . .

Could he not risk something to attain such an end ?

Nhanh arose.

His silhouette formed a momentary shadow, vague and dark, against the viscous waters.

.

With scarce a splash, Nhanh glided into the moat. A few rapid strokes, and, despite the twining stems of the water-plants, he reached the opposite side.

He began the difficult ascent. Gripping the projections of the stone, raising himself by sheer muscular strength, Nhanh reached the top of the wall.

After a glance all round, the man let himself fall to the earth. He was in the Citadel.

He crawled, rather than walked, to the mausoleum. There again he had recourse to his acrobatic gifts.

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

II

In the inner court the silence was more oppressive. Nanh stood motionless. . . . Was no mysterious guardian there hidden, ready to raise the alarm as soon as he should perceive the robber's presence ?

Not a sound. Death reigned, and silence. The very owls fled those mournful walls.

Then Nanh took the pick-axe he bore on his shoulder, and went about his ghastly business.

He took heed, however, to avoid the spot where the warriors were buried. . . . Already his spirit held out less strongly against ghostly hallucinations. He dug, demolished, excavated. . . . He loosened a great slab.

Sweat streamed from his brow, his nails were torn, his hands covered with blood.

Hours passed. Nanh had discovered nothing.

He was panting, almost exhausted ; his breath whistled through his clenched teeth.

All at once his bruised fingers felt a hard

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

substance. . . . It was the king's coffin. Superstitious fear invaded his spirit ; dared he perpetrate that frightful profanation ?

There the old Chieftain slept his eternal sleep. . . . Was it for him, Nhanh, to break that majestic and sacred slumber ?

The man stood shaking and undecided. . . . But a feeling stronger, more imperious than his fear, drove away that dread, that hesitation.

The treasure was there, within reach of his hand. . . . A little labour, a little courage . . . and in a few moments he would possess inexhaustible riches.

At the thought his strength redoubled.

A violent blow with the pick-axe, and the coffin lay open. And Nhanh, cynical all at once, tore away the silks, and displaced the royal bones.

At last ! His fingers felt the contact of metal ; the treasure was found !

Bars of silver were there, jewels of gold, and precious stones.

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

Delirious joy filled the wretch's soul.

Rapidly he heaped up the riches in the folded cere-cloth.

Did he leave aught behind? No.

Hastily Nanh threw back into the hole he had dug the wreckage of bones, wood, stone, and earth. . . . He replaced the heavy slab.

III

Nanh was now immensely rich.

He had but to leave the Citadel, and flee into some far country, where he might fearlessly enjoy his accursèd fortune.

He could aspire henceforth to every honour, covet the most beautiful *congaies*, despite his frightful face. . . . Is woman ever insensible to the charm of gold?

His thick-lipped mouth opened in a silent, satanic laugh.

Nanh settled his precious burden firmly on his loins. Nimbly, gaily, he climbed the walls, and threw himself into the moat,

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

One moment, and he would reach the shore. . . . It was time ; dawn whitened the horizon, and nature was awaking. . . .

IV

What befell Nhanh ? His limbs became immovable, a hideous spasm grew fixed on his horrified face, and hoarse sounds issued from his throat. . . . The water-lilies' long flexible stalks fettered the thief ; enormous snakes twined round his legs, his arms, his body.

The Chieftain's treasure grew heavy—strangely heavy.

Nhanh made desperate efforts. . . . 'Twas a fearful fight he sustained against the reptiles, more ferocious than the fiercest dragons of legend. . . .

It was day.

Peasants passed by ; women came and went about the houses.

Nhanh shouted. Folks came running.

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

Ten tried, and twenty, to aid the man in distress. 'Twas all in vain.

Nhanh was dragged down to the bottom of the moat by an invisible, invincible Power.

All at once the time-worn silks let the treasure escape. A miracle happened. During one long minute, floating light as cork, the magic treasures were displayed on the surface of the miry water.

The dazzled spectators beheld the glitter of the goldsmith's work, the sparkle of the gems. . . . Then suddenly all disappeared.

Men, women, youths, ancients, tried to snatch something of gold or silver. . . . They drew up nothing in their nets but loathsome mire and pestiferous beasts.

v

Centuries have fallen into the gulf of Time.

Despite the minutest, most patient search,

The Treasure of the Cham Chieftain

the phantasmal riches, seen for a moment, yet remain hidden.

Sometimes by night, when the grey sky sheds a diffused gloaming, a man's form is seen crouching by the moat of the Citadel of Cao-Lao.

He is dreaming of the Cham Chieftain's treasure.

(Souvenir of a visit to the Citadel of Cao-Lao, 1910.)

III

THE DEATH OF MY LORD TIGER

I

HE was very old, My Lord Tiger. Once upon a time, in the season of his youthful loves and successful stag-hunts, he had chosen his dwelling amid the bosky woods of the Quang-Tsi.

His renowned prowess was much talked of in tiger society ; none had known better how to seize in their haunts the tremulous does, or track the agile stags among the lianas. But that was long, long ago.

Through a stiffness in the shoulder his gait became heavy and halting ; his whiskers grew inordinately ; and his claws, broken or over-long, hindered him when it came to catching his prey.

Unhappy Lord !

The Death of My Lord Tiger

He was reduced to short commons ; he had to eat Man !

A self-respecting tiger, as everyone knows, does not come to such cruel straits for fun.

Our old Lord was exceeding sad. Under the sarcastic gaze of boastful young tigers, he was forced, when hunger became too pressing, to wait long hours for a carter at the turn of the road, tear a wood-cutter's throat, or stalk women going to market.

Then again—had these ill-bred persons only offered themselves up with a good grace ! Far from that, they presumed to resist, not realizing what honour was done them.

So My Lord, with his somewhat crazy teeth, crunched such humans as he could catch.

No one can be unaware that the soul of a man or a woman—when she happens to have one—cannot attain Nirvâna if its body should have served as food for a Lord. It must await this Lord's death ere it can win eternal felicity. Till then it must needs

The Death of My Lord Tiger

ride a cock-horse on the swallower's back, even should the latter live as long as Methuselah.

This position at times is excessively awkward. Our noble Lord bore on his back numberless souls, jammed up, poor things, dashed against one another, a wailing chorus, all fighting for the best place.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said a carpenter to an old *ba-gia*, "I was eaten before you. That place is due to me, next the mane, by which one can cling on so comfortably."

"Not at all! I got this place before you. Since to start with you chose the cushioned croup, stop there!"

Bitter and wounding were the words they exchanged.

Verily that tiger's spine presented no worshipful picture of happiness!

Every week brought a fresh tenant. It was most disastrous! You can imagine with what exquisite amenities the new-comer was welcomed.

The Death of My Lord Tiger

Now there came a fine day when not the least little particle of the fell was unoccupied.

On that day, as on others, My Lord was hungry. He was, indeed, extremely hungry.

While passing by a village, he spied an old man, who was filling his buckets at the pagoda well.

With a "*han!*" of sheer weariness, he shook his mane, heavy with souls, and his decrepit talons proved strong enough to pull down the old man; who expired.

Where was the wretch's soul to find a place? It found one . . . at the tip of the tail.

There was a lack of comfort about it. I leave you to picture the buffetings, the giddy swayings, of that poor soul!

The smallest midge that went by caused fantastic oscillations.

Old Cai—the last eaten—could not stand it. He suffered from frightful headaches,

The Death of My Lord Tiger

and no less frightful sickness. At last an idea occurred to him ; he made his escape, for a brief moment, from his unstable perch, and appeared to his brother.

“ Brother Quir,” he said, “ I am most unhappy. My place is incommodious, and my poor fingers cannot grip My Lord’s tail tight enough. I’m everlastingly falling and hurting myself. Take pity on me ! ”

“ What can I do for you ? ”

“ Burn wax tapers before the Buddha Sakya-Muni. Choose the finest and most brilliantly coloured ; and ask the All-Powerful to grant me repose.”

“ I will do what you wish, Brother Cai.”

“ The day after to-morrow you must gather together the young men of the village, and catch My Lord.”

“ Brother Cai, isn’t it a most impious thing to attack a Lord ? ”

“ This one, Brother Quir, has lived long enough.”

“ I will do your bidding.”

The Death of My Lord Tiger

II

Never had My Lord Tiger seemed so devoid of sense.

He staggered, he knocked up against tree-trunks, with the bearing of a man in a state of utter intoxication.

The souls on his back danced an infernal jig. Cai pulled the lordly tail now left, now right, now up, now down. He did so well that he guided My Lord towards the ditch, whither he was lured by the kid's bleating.

But the Lord Buddha doubtless desired not this pleasing animal's death ; a desperate bound lifted the kid out of the ditch, where the crippled tiger alone remained.

He proceeded to caterwaul with anguish. And behold, all the beasts came running from every side of the forest.

There came a stag who ripped My Lord's hide, a hyena who burst out a-laughing, a wolf who fell to with his teeth, and a crow with his smiting beak.

The Tiger was sore beset, and thought

The Death of My Lord Tiger

he must die. He writhed with agony and shame; and up came a man with a snickersee!

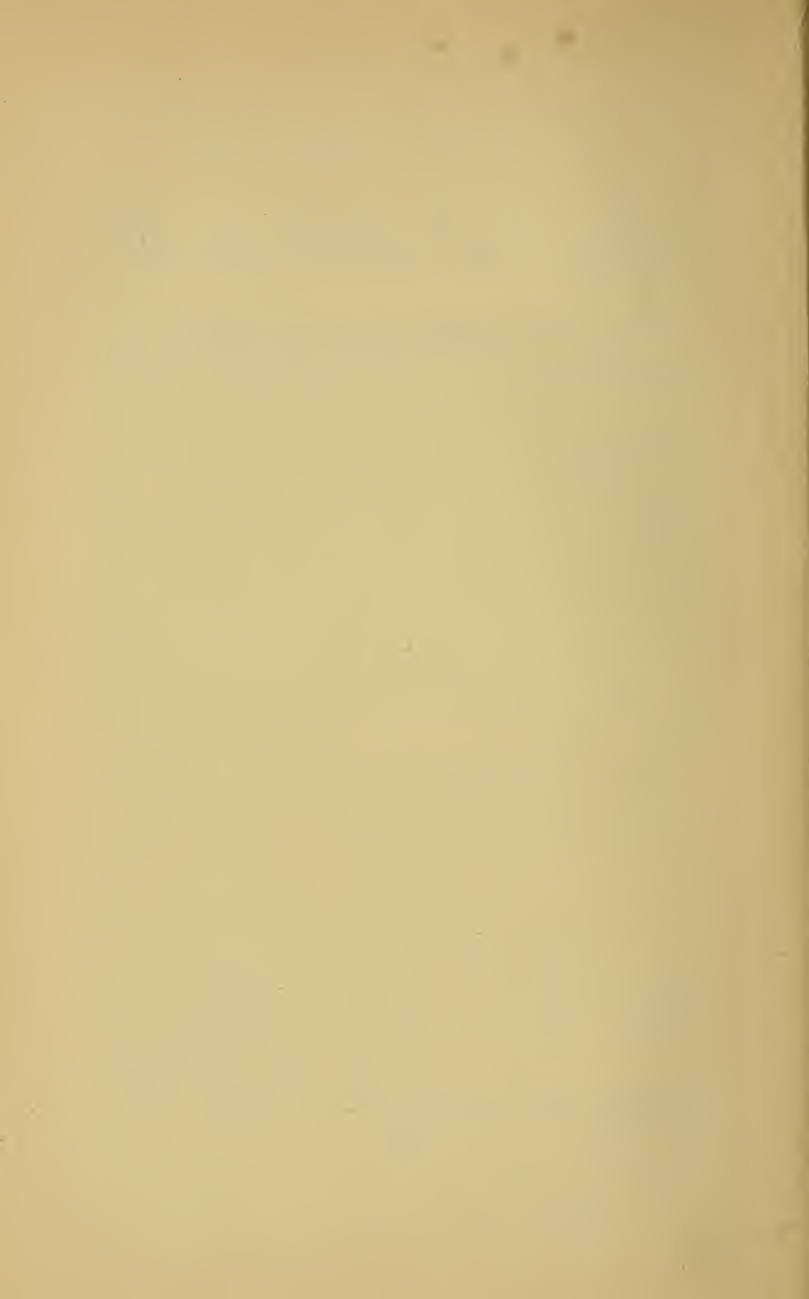
My Lord stiffened himself, tried to rise upon his feet, and exterminate the impudent creature; but did not succeed.

The snickersee came down thrice, and the old Lord expired.

The souls took flight with such energy that the fat *ba-gia* had two teeth pulled out, and the carpenter lost his wig.

Nowadays the old Tigers of the Quang-Tsi will sooner die of hunger than attack Man.

Moral: Don't trust one of them!



IV

IN THE DRAGON KINGDOM

ONLY during the last four or five generations have men learnt a little more of the singular Dragon Kingdom, whose redoubtable monarch is Vua-long-Vuong.

No one, even before that, was ignorant of the marvellous deeds done by the Water-Genie—shipwrecks, sudden spates, droughts, and devastating inundations.

Well known was the tragical tale of the lovely Kâm-Kông, enchanted by the Dragon-King, and borne down into his dripping caves ; but no one so far had been able to learn anything of the mysterious kingdom, for those who went thither did not return to relate their experiences.

Years passed away. A well-founded fear made every worthy Annamite tremble

In the Dragon Kingdom

who passed at nightfall by the banks of a river or the sea-side; but some strong minds there were who derided these superstitious terrors. When lo and behold! the genie Vua-long-Vuong got himself talked about afresh.

A father and daughter, in their sampan, were crossing the Song-Lo.

The father, standing in the stern, steered the boat with a long oar, while the young maiden, crouched laughing in the bows, sang one of those long complaints dear to the sampaniers.

From time to time, to lift up the paternal heart, she chanted in saucy tones the working-song of the coolies:

“Gio ta! Gio ta!

And thou, the Master of the Moon, thou hast wedded an ancient wife! I'll come to thee and pull thy beard!

Gio ta! Gio ta!

And when I descend again to earth, she'll be dead, mine aged wife; I'll wed a youthful one, brand new!

Gio ta! Gio ta!”

She, Thi-Nam, was thirteen years old.

In the Dragon Kingdom

Spring made a divine blossom of her crimson lips.

A luckless notion, that of hers, to place the thong of her basket around her neck !

A sudden movement of the boat made her lose balance. Thi-Nam fell into the water. She was able, for an instant, to hang by her hands on the edge of the sampan ; but, burdened by the heavy basket which dragged back her head, she quickly let go, and sank.

This may seem an ordinary accident. The sequel is more mysterious.

The father plunged in after his child, and at first was so fortunate as to seize her. He was stupefied, amazed, to see her laughing and singing as though she were still aboard the boat. He fancied himself prey to some horrible nightmare. . . .

The flower-lips opened like an unfolding bud :

“ Gio ta ! Gio ta ! ”

He took his little one in his arms, but

In the Dragon Kingdom

could not bring her up to the surface of the waves. She grew heavy, infinitely heavy. And the voice continued, saucily :

“Gio ta ! Gio ta !

A brand-new wife, who will make me . . . wear horns !

Gio ta ! Gio ta !”

The genie had taken possession of Thi-Nam.

Despite all his efforts, the luckless father could not lift his child from the water, and was forced to abandon her to her ravisher.

Once back in the village, he made appeal to certain young men, excellent swimmers, among them one Banh-Mong, Thi-Nam's betrothed.

Banh-Mong was very mighty, for he was guided and protected by Love.

He plunged into the river. So deep did he dive that he reached the realm of the genie, followed, at some distance, by all his companions.

There they found a country resembling

In the Dragon Kingdom

that situated above the waters. Mountains were there covered with forest, and villages whose inhabitants were fish.

They did not find Thi-Nam. Banh-Mong bewailed himself, and with loud outcries demanded his love.

All at once Vua-long-Vuong appeared.

“Which wilt thou choose, young man? Life in day-light without Thi-Nam, or eternal night with thy beloved?”

“I will be with Thi-Nam!” replied Banh-Mong.

“Be happy, then!” said the genie.

The sea-god vanished, taking with him Banh-Mong. The youth’s companions beheld him no more, and returned, terrified, to the village of Ban-Han.

They had not seen the abode of Vua-long-Vuong, nor the place where he concealed his victims.

A certain old man, Thay-Loi by name, learnt more than they.

In the Dragon Kingdom

Too poor to live in idleness, and too feeble for hard work, he kept ducks on the bank of the Song-Luong.

One day he saw a great light, which seemed to come forth from the water, and advance towards the earth. . . . And all at once a magnificent Being stood before him.

Old men have experience in their favour ; there is time to learn a thing or two in the course of a long life.

Thay-Loï knew how to recognize gods. He recognized the genie, without ever having beheld him, by these two characteristic signs : his wide-open eyes stared at the sun without being the least dazzled, and his body cast no shadow.

Vua-long-Vuong was accompanied by four dragons with human heads, who surrounded old Thay-Loï, and drew him down under water.

By means of walking—as on earth—they drew near to Song-Ma.

In the Dragon Kingdom

Then the genie ordered the old man to cut down some enormous trees.

Thay-Loï dared not refuse. He took the hatchet which was handed him, and set to work.

A little, mocking voice chanted in the distance :

“Gio ta ! Gio ta !

And the spider that will drop from the ceiling, and swing at the end of a long thread above my door, will tell the whole village that I . . . wear horns !

Gio ta ! Gio ta !”

Thay-Loï thought he would have to make mighty exertions. . . .

Not at all !

However great the trees' dimensions, three or four blows of the axe sufficed to fell them. No sooner were they down, than rain came, in the nick of time, to form streams which carried them to the Dragon-King's dwelling.

Every evening Thay-Loï, his day's work completed, mounted astride on the last

In the Dragon Kingdom

felled tree, and reached the gate of the emerald palace.

A dragon with phosphorescent eyes then conducted him through grand corridors, and fine saloons sparkling with jewels, to a spacious room hung with blue watered-silk, where 'Thay-Loï slept on a bed of seaweed.

This went on for four days, after which Vua-long-Vuong permitted the old man to go and rejoin his ducks. He found them just on the spot where he had left them ; and, though he had neither eaten nor drunk all those four days, he felt better in health than before his departure.

Thay-Loï, however, saw neither Kâm-Kông, nor Thi-Nam, nor the others ; but, having recognized the small, mocking voice, he thought the maid must be keeping well.

Since the genie, moreover, had treated him civilly—him, Thay-Loï, the needy old fellow—why imagine that the love-

In the Dragon Kingdom

liest girls of Annam should lack care and attention at the court of Vua-long-Vuong?

It was, of course, Thay-Loï who subsequently gave this accurate (?) information as to the realm and abode of the Water-Genie.

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It is unseemly in Annam to doubt an old man's word.

For "four generations," therefore, the fable I have related has been implicitly believed.

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When the Water-Genie shows himself too inhuman and voracious, sacrifices are offered to appease him—usually rice, fruit, or small coins—after which a magician raises incantations to drive him away.

Then Vua-long-Vuong takes refuge with one of his uncles, blind and crippled, but uncommonly powerful, who dwells in a grotto of the Pu-Kun, near Mong-Ha.

In the Dragon Kingdom

He never stays there very long. The sorcerers whose charms are strongest cannot prevent the genie's return from time to time, along the rivers and the rice-fields, to carry off the beautiful *congaies*, the fishermen, or the sampaniers.

V

THE BETEL AND THE ARECA-TREE

I

CLOSE by Tourane there is a delicious “corner” of France.

That heaven of burning sapphire, is it not our own Mediterranean sky? Those great marble peaks, reddening under the kiss of the sun, are they not the rose-coloured Esterel? And that caressing sea, which lazily lies along the coast, is it not the sea of our own Provence?

Here as there palms winnow the golden light, and the scent of the flowering orange-trees has the same intoxicating languor.

The joy of “recognizing” this dream-landscape had driven away every homesick thought—those ugly thoughts that seize one at times when far from the Mother-land.

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

Tired by a long walk, we stretched ourselves on the warm sand ; but an intense thirst, a true oriental thirst, troubled the peace of the hour ; while Phù-Io, our boy, blissfully chewed his betel.

Then we, we too, tasted the red, rather repulsive thing.

The thirst vanished. We were amazed at the marvel. Phù-Io explained it by this legend :

They had been walking for long days, weary and out of heart.

Two twin-brothers were they, of equal beauty. Both had the same slender frame, the same frank look, the same warm, well-toned voice.

So much alike were they that their own mother had never known them apart.

One was Lang, and one was Cau.

Lang and Cau had had a happy childhood. Sons of a mighty mandarin, surrounded with care, honour, and affection, their lot had aroused no little envy.

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

All this happiness vanished in disaster. The great fire which ruined the twin youths orphaned them too, and dispersed their friends.

Sorrowful, they went their way, unable to give their dead better burial than a heap of blackened cinders. . . . And every gust of wind scattered the sacred dust more widely.

Cau and Lang sighed for the past—so near as yet—and marched on towards the future.

Great was their weariness, and, despite their spirited youth, their star of hope grew wan.

Would they ever find one hospitable soul?—meet a friend who would help them?—a just master who would accept their work, to whom they might dedicate their wits, or the strength of their arms?

Lang and Cau followed a narrow path close by the sea.

Day was declining, and the sadness of the dying light increased their own melancholy.

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

The wan waves plunged, broke, and spread sobbing along the strand. The grass-hoppers buzzed, forlorn.

Heavy-winged and enormous, the moths adventured in the shade of the mangroves, and the fire-flies began their luminous dances.

Lang and Cau perceived, amid stunted palm-trees, an assemblage of rustic cabins, heaped and huddled as though in fear, sustaining one another against the attack of some invisible foe, or some monstrous divinity hidden beneath the bitter billows.

This was Cua-Hàn,¹ a little fishing-village.

Among the poverty-stricken roofs, the young men remarked a less primitive dwelling, surrounded by a green hedge.

"Brother," said Cau, "wilt thou, yet once again, appeal to a rich man's pity? Shall we enter into that dwelling?"

"Yes, Lang, let us enter. Who knows

¹ Tourane.

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

whether Destiny have not reserved us here our appointed place? Moreover, I am at an end of my strength, and my feet to-day will bear me no further."

"I too am broken by weariness, yet not so deeply as by despair."

"Courage, Lang!"

"Courage, Cau! Thou sayest well. Leaning the one on the other, we can better endure the strokes of adversity."

Lang stretched out his hand; Cau placed his own in it. A great tenderness shone in the eyes of the twins, and both cried, well-nigh joyously:

"Let us go in!"

II

They shook the dust from their garments, bathed their bruised, travel-stained feet, and went towards the rich abode.

Scarcely had they skirted the *binh-phong*—the stone screen placed before the door, and decked with cabalistic signs—than they

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

stood still, spell-bound by an exquisite apparition.

Standing on the lower steps of the verandah, a young maiden, clad in white, seemed to centre on herself all the light of the dying day.

Slender, with black diamond eyes and swan-neck, with voluptuous shoulders and undulating hips, she was ravishing to look upon.

Her taper fingers caressed the single string of a quaint musical instrument, and she murmured in low tones what seemed a rhythmical complaint :

“O sun, wherefore dost thou flee? Whither goest? That
thou mayst pour out thy warmth on other worlds?

Wherefore dost allow the night to extend her long veil?

’Tis the night gives slumber.

Why sleep? To slumber is to die; when we sleep, we
love not.

Love, therein is our true life . . . yet I, I know not
Love.

The ring-dove loves his mate, as My Lord Tiger his.

Who shall love me? To him I’ll give my heart for ever.

Come back, O sun! Shine on him, show him, him that
shall love me, that I may love him!”

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

Cau and Lang, unmoving, listened to the lovely songstress. No longer were they fatigued, no longer faint-hearted.

III

Six months went by.

Lang and Cau were still at Cua-Hàn. They worked in the house of Giàu, the Mandarin. Every day Giàu valued more highly the diligence and devotion of the young men.

And daily Lang, and daily Cau, watching the fair Thi-Trâu knot up her raven hair, thought gravely there was no greater joy than that of dwelling in Giàu's abode.

Thi-Trâu was dreamy. . . . Her adoring father prayed her to choose a husband among the young sons of mandarins who came to ask her hand.

Thi-Trâu could not make up her mind. . . . Weeks passed, and months. At length the maiden announced to her father that

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

she would wed none save one of the two brethren.

Lang should be her spouse . . . or Cau ; but which of them ? So much alike were they that Thi-Trâu never thought of them apart. . . . But one or the other must be chosen.

Who was the handsomer, who the wiser, the stronger, the wittier, the better ?

Cau possessed every desirable quality. So did Lang.

Thi-Trâu was a woman ; long since had she divined the ardent love of Lang, the loving ardour of Cau.

The virgin gave over to Fate the business of showing the spouse who should be hers ; she would let fall one of her gilded wooden slippers, and he who should bring it her must be her husband.

IV

That husband was Lang.

Lang was infinitely happy. His happi-

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

ness dazzled him, made him drunk. He saw only Thi-Trâu, heard only Thi-Trâu, and consequently perceived not Cau's sombre reddened eyes, and features worn for want of sleep . . . heard not his twin-brother's sighings and woeful sobs.

Thi-Trâu alone existed in all the world.

Cau was in despair. Cau suffered a nameless martyrdom ; the woman he loved could never be his ; and Lang, his other self, had not only bereft him of his beloved, but denied him also that brotherly love, so sweet, so profound, which hitherto he had lavished on him.

Oh Lang ! Oh Thi-Trâu !

And Cau longed to die.

. ,

That autumn eve was soft as a kiss. The sea sang its caressing song. Cau went wandering on the strand, with unkempt locks, with burning brow.

Oh to suffer no more ! To sleep for ever,
nor dream of cruel life !

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

To feel no more that fiery torrent which coursed in his veins, that mountain of grief crushing his heart in his bosom ! . . . Die, and love no more those heartless beings who loved not, or who forgot !

Cau took the plunge. The flood opened to receive the beautiful slender body . . . but closed not over it. It rocked the dead youth as a mother rocks her new-born child, and softly laid him on the beach.

Then the miracle was accomplished. The slim body was transformed into a lovely slender tree ; 'twas the areca.

Horried, meanwhile, Lang and Thi-Trâu had beheld the drama, and their locked fingers were unloosened.

Lang rushed out on the strand.

“Cau, Cau, come back, my brother ! Forgive me ! I have been selfish, 'tis true, but I love thee, oh believe it ! . . . I have never left off loving thee. Come back, Cau, or take me whither thou art gone !”

The portent was renewed. From the

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

soil beaten by the salt waves sprang up two splendid areca-trees, one by the other, mingling the foliage of their magnificent crowns, both alike as fair and proud as Lang and Cau were equal in beauty and in nobility.

And Thi-Trâu bewailed herself :

“ Oh, my spouse ! Oh, my brother ! Why have ye abandoned me ? Would I might die with ye, since 'twas I who caused your deaths ! ”

The young wife embraced with her fair arms the trunk of the tree-genie.

“ May the gods join me for ever with my husband ! ”

She spoke, and her desire was accomplished.

Her slim, supple body grew slimmer and suppler still ; her fingers, her locks, became graceful leaves.

Thi-Trâu was a liana twining round the areca-tree ; she was a betel-plant.

Merciful are the gods. Thi-Trâu's fleshy

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

arms embraced in modesty only the body of Lang ; her vegetable arms caressed both Lang and Cau.

v

This was in the time of one of the Hung monarchs, a time when so many marvels happened. This king, apparently the third, went to Cua-Hàn, that he might admire that creeper and those singular trees.

The seventh month had stirred the sun's fires. So overwhelming was the heat that the plants were dried up, the beasts crawled painfully about, and men perished beneath the planet's burning rays.

The king's bearers themselves could only with great difficulty sustain their majestic burden.

The cortège, nevertheless, crossed the Pass of the Clouds, and traversed the high brush amid apathetic tigers, prostrate elephants, and indolent boa-constrictors.

It was nearly decimated when it reached

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

Cua-Hàn. And immediately the Hung monarch betook himself to the beach.

He bathed, made all his escort bathe, and stretched himself wearily under the charming group formed by the trees and the twining betel. A burning thirst dried up his throat, and his lips were on fire.

Not a tree all around bore fruit to slake the royal thirst !

The sea-breeze shook the lofty heads of the two arecas.

Amid the lanceolated leaves, the king observed certain green nuts. He ordered that they be gathered for him.

This was no easy matter, and the king's servants did not go swiftly to work. . . . The king, in his impatience, began to chew a leaf of betel. It was yet in his mouth when they brought him an areca-nut.

'Twas a revelation ! The burning thirst vanished ; the king's lips grew cool and sweet-scented.

The Betel and the Areca-Tree

The whole court copied their sovereign, and felt the better for it.

When the royal cortège left Cua-Hàn, not one among the servants went heavily and painfully as at their coming. They all went singing, gay and happy, despite the fearful heat about them.

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Don't be surprised if, in memory of that miracle, the Indo-Chinese perpetually chew betel and areca-nuts !

They keep up the old tradition. That betel and those nuts are to them no mere "refreshments"; they are symbols and emblems.

They are images of conjugal love, fraternal love, family love.

A branch of betel, twined round an areca-bough, is given as a symbolical gift by the young man betrothed to his future wife.

Could he more gracefully plight his troth ?

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The Betel and the Areca-Tree

Swift twilight darkened the Marble mountains. In the sapphire heaven that paled to turquoise, the moon's slender crescent pierced a gauzy violet cloud.

We took once more the road to Tourane.

VI

SONGS OF BLIND MEN

IN the land of Annam almost all the blind are artless wandering poets. They are loved, respected, and what is more, listened to.

They are to be met with at the market, by the cross-roads, and along the highway.

When the sky darkens in the brief gloaming, when the fireflies streak the darkness, zebra-fashion, with their phosphorescent flight, when the evening breeze bows with showery sound the ripe rice-plants and bamboos, then the blind men's lament dominates the murmurs of new-born night; it glides along the river surface like the song of the sampaniers.

The child will leave the most engrossing

Songs of Blind Men

pastime to give the blind man his hand and show him the way.

The blind are they who spread news from village to village; it is they who give life to pleasing legends and witty fables; they who teach—with the most incredible variations—the history of their native land.

They are paid with a bowl of rice or tea, with fruit, or a few little coins.

I had, down yonder, “my own” blind man. He was an old man, whose brown face contrasted strongly with a thin, white, silky beard. His wrinkles were jovial ones; but, beneath his palm-leaf hat, his brow was grave as that of a prophet or a bonze.

My blind man used to go by at night-fall, as he returned from market. When we heard his characteristic song we would go down to the flowering hedge which enclosed the garden. Phù-Io would carry money for him.

The blind man would express his grati-

Songs of Blind Men

tude in emphatic terms. He would call down on us the blessing of the genii, and would often repeat to us the story he had told to the traffickers of Phù-Cam, his usual audience.

Here are some of the complaints and fables chanted by my blind man.

VII

THE MARKET OF PHÙ-CAM

THE market of Phù-Cam is a fine market.

'Tis held at the end of the wooden bridge,
by the bank of the tawny arroyo.

People go thither afoot or in boats.

People sell pork there, people sell
silk.

They sell also rice, and eggs of ducks,
manioc, chickens, and fish.

Do ye desire golden bananas or acid
lemons? Go to the market of Phù-
Cam.

There ye will find betel-quids, and cream
of pounded haricot-beans, tea freshly in-
fused, and the best-rolled cigarettes.

There the seller of soup is pretty, and
the cleanser of ears adroit.

The Market of Phù-Cam

Go to the market of Phù-Cam !

There are, indeed, greater and more magnificent markets. There is that of Dong-ba, that of Han-Kéou, that of Gia-Hoï, and that of Kim-Long.

But the women of Gia-Hoï leave their blue pots and their copper vessels to come and buy fish at Phù-Cam.

All along the clear river and dim arroyo the women of Kim-Long bring their *ganhs* filled with vegetables.

When they return they have strings of pice round their necks and round their shoulders.

Those who dwell near the King's Mountain come no less ; and the dwellers beyond the Plain of Tombs, near the sepulchres of the Emperors, and further than the Nam-Giao.

At the market of Dong-ba there is greater choice of bright-hued silks, there are more combs and bodices.

There they marry the Annamite maidens

The Market of Phù-Cam

to Frenchmen fair and fat ; but at the market of Phù-Cam they sell not the daughters of Annam.

There, the plighted lovers alone may walk in the shadow of their beloved ones, and carry the over-heavy baskets.

At the market of Phù-Cam both they who buy and they who sell give alms to the blind.

May the all-powerful genie of the village of Phù-Cam bless its happy inhabitants !

May the old men behold the sons of their sons !

May the maidens be beautiful and good !

May the students be numerous, may they be diligent and successful in the examinations !

May the father of the family have rice for his children, and the mother be able to suckle the lesser ones !

May the harvest be abundant !

The blind man says : To all be thanks !

The Market of Phù-Cam

The market of Phù-Cam is held at the end of the wooden bridge, by the banks of the tawny arroyo. The market of Phù-Cam is a fine market!

VIII

THE CROW AND THE PEACOCK

ONE day the Peacock said to the Crow :
“ To-day is My Lord Tiger’s wedding. How shall we dress to attend the festivities ? ”

In those days the Crow was white, and the Peacock yellow as a hen.

The Crow replied :

“ I have a notion ; the King of Annam is having a house built. ’Tis an admirable house ! They are mingling on its walls all the hues of the rainbow. Dragons are there, red and yellow, green and blue. The workmen have gone to eat their rice. Let us go take their colour-pots ! ”

The Crow proceeded to carry out his notion.

The Peacock asked to be painted first.

The Crow and the Peacock

The Crow, who wished to show his dexterity, drew moons, gold and green, on the Peacock's feathers, with arabesques of blue and black.

The Peacock was gorgeous. He went to gaze at himself in the river, and spread his tail to dry his plumes ; but he thought himself so fine that he went on spreading it, even when his plumes were dry, saying :

“ *Công tốt ! Công tốt !* How handsome am I ! ”

The Crow cried :

“ 'Tis thy turn, companion, to show thy cunning ! ”

The Peacock was vain and jealous. He had no intention of adorning the Crow for My Lord Tiger's wedding feast.

Said he :

“ Didst thou not hear the Eagle's cry ? Let us flee ! Let us hide ourselves ! ”

Feigning extreme haste, he threw himself against the colour-pots, and sent them flying into the river.

The Crow and the Peacock

“ I hear not the Eagle’s cry,” said the Crow.

“ ’Twas my mistake. Come and be painted.”

“ The paint is at the bottom of the river.”

“ One pot remains.”

“ Then make haste ! ”

The Peacock besmeared the Crow with black paint, saying : “ Now art thou beautiful ! ”

The Crow went to gaze at himself in the river, and was cruelly disappointed. He wished to bewail himself ; but his voice died in his throat, and he cried, most hideously :

“ *Couah ! Couah !* ”

Since those days, crows have been black and hoarse of voice, while peacocks are pied with a thousand hues.

They sing none the better for that !

Moral : Beware of false friends.

IX

THE DAUGHTER OF KING MINH-TONG

DWELLERS in Phù-Cam, I will tell ye
the tale of a pretty princess.

She was a king's daughter decked with the
loveliest gems.

Her fingers knew only the caress of the
softest silks ; those long-nailed fingers
were covered with rings and nail-cases
studded with diamonds.

Her throat was adorned with long necklaces
of over a hundred golden beads.

Everywhere at her passing the Annamites
bowed themselves down, with foreheads
in the dust,¹

While the royal musicians accompanied her
with sound of flutes and guitars.

Happy are the daughters of kings !

¹ The ancient Annamite law forbade subjects, under pain
of death, to lift their eyes to the king.

The Daughter of King Minh-Tong

But now a mighty minister shut up the
king in a dark dungeon.

That king was Minh-Tong. Minh-Tong
was doomed to die of hunger, and
the princess was driven from the palace.
They took away her ear-rings and golden
necklace,

And her rings and her bracelets and her
nail-cases.

Her fingers felt the contact of coarse stuffs.
Her nails were broken.

The Annamites looked her in the face !
She heard, by way of music, only the wind
wailing in the palm-trees.

Hapless sometimes are the daughters of
kings

The princess prayed to see her father. Long
was that grace denied her.

At length they accorded her the desired
permission,

But on condition that she took him no food,
under pain of death.

The Daughter of King Minh-Tong

Then the princess dipped her robes in the
clear river,

And went to the dungeon with moistened
dress.

And, while she embraced her sire, she
squeezed her garments into the poor
parched mouth.

The king Minh-Tong lived awhile, thanks
to his daughter's devotion.

All the daughters of Annam would have
done no less. For they are, one and
all, good and devoted.

This complaint, a very popular one,
contradicts historical fact. Trân-Minh-
Tong was a legislator beloved by the people.
His father-in-law, falsely convicted of con-
spiracy, was condemned to death by hunger.
The queen (wife, not daughter, of Minh-
Tong) consoled the old man, and alleviated
his agonies.

X

THE GENIE OF THE TAN-VIEN

TIME was, when the mighty Genie of the Tan-Vien was only a very wily boy.

He dwelt on the shores of the Song-Koi.

From an old man he learnt that a dragon dwelt in the depths of the river.

Ye know, all of ye, that dragons give power and good fortune to mortals.

The Dragon of the Song-Koi could confer kingship and immortality.

Those who would obtain these gifts must plunge to the bottom of the Red River.

He who desired to reign must make a bundle of his ancestors' bones, and place it in the dragon's mouth.

This was no easy enterprise, for he became blind who looked on the dragon.

The Genie of the Tan-Vien

'Tis woeful to be blind !

The artful youth made a bundle of his ancestors' bones, and plunged into the Song-Koi.

But he was heedful to hide an eye with one of his hands.

"If I lose an eye," he thought, "I shall see with the other ; and I shall be a king."

He lost one eye, and became a Genie.

And now ye know, all of ye, wherefore the Genie of the Tan-Vien has but one eye, and mighty power.

XI

THE TAILOR OF HUÉ

HE was a skilful tailor, the Tailor of Hué.

And, though he knew not the characters of the *Tuo-tu-kinh*, he knew many other things.

Age and good sense had taught him experience.

Folk came from far and wide to ask his advice. From far and wide, moreover, came the dandies, so that he might fashion, sew, and embroider their costly garments.

Beneath the straw-thatched pent-house, the tailor, squatted like a Buddha, composed admirable designs ; birds, flowers, and dragons, which he scattered over the dazzling silks.

The Tailor of Hué

To all comers he distributed the maxims which are the wisdom of peoples.

To Thi-Léou the jealous he counselled trust in her husband, and her household became calm.

To Thi-Ba the haughty, who “bore her heart in her neck,” he spoke thus: “The hen that sings doth not bring up her brood. . . . Beware, O woman, of ceaseless self-exaltation, for fame will rend the garments which she has woven thee.”

Thi-Ba laughed at his counsels, and time showed that the tailor was right.

One day the Prime Minister sought the tailor, and ordered a court-dress.

“I will make it, O your Excellency,” said the tailor: “’tis a great honour for me. Here be shining silks, broidered with moons of gold.”

“Make me a dress of this material.”

“I will do so, O your Excellency; but, before I cut the silk, tell me how long you have been in power.”

The Tailor of Hué

“What is that to you?”

“Your Excellency, I am but a poor tailor; my question is not indiscreet, and cannot injure you; I ask this information so that the cut of your dress may be perfect.”

“What has this to do with the cut of my dress?”

“Behold, O your Excellency! If you have only recently been favoured with the king’s confidence, you will walk with high-held head and bulging breast.

“In such a case, that your dress may sit well, I must make the front folds much longer than those at the back.

“If you have been used for some years to your honourable burden, your pride will be the less, and I must cut your garment with equal folds.

“But, if the years have fallen, many and weighty, on your shoulders; if your monarch’s numerous caprices and acts of injustice have forced you to bow your

The Tailor of Hué

head ; if disgust of life has seized on you like a sickness, and profound thought bent your eyes on the ground where you will lie some coming day ; then, O your Excellency, you will acknowledge that the front fold of your dress must be shorter than the back.

“This, O your Excellency, is the reason why I have seemed in your eyes inquisitive and a gossip.

“My excuse is that I would fain accomplish a work which will give you perfect satisfaction !”

The Tailor of Hué is dead.

’Tis a great pity, since to him might be sent for cure all the proud—of whom the earth is full !

All the jealous women—and they, alas ! are innumerable !

(M. Pasquier has in part translated this Blind Man’s Song.)

XII

THE BLIND MAN

I AM blind.

'Tis a most woeful fate.

'Twenty years old was I when mine eyes
were deprived of light.

I knew no longer night nor day.

I know there is dawn, white and rosy,
a beaming golden sun, and a silvery moon ;
I know that at midnight the three stars in
the Baldric of Orion gleam forth in mid-
most heaven.

I know that the birds and butterflies
bear the rainbow on their wings.

I know that the flowers wear robes
woven by the genii's fingers.

I know there be women lovely as god-
desses.

But I see nothing here below.

The Blind Man

Twenty years old was I when mine eyes
were bereft of daylight ; and I was but
newly wed.

My wife was young, my wife was fair.

When she unloosed the knot, her hair
fell even to her knees.

Her eyes shone like the stars.

Her brow was smooth, her lips were red ;
her lacquered teeth lay close one against
another.

That is long, long ago !

And I, I am blind evermore.

But, if I see not the birds, I hear them
sing.

If I see no more the flowers, I smell their
perfume.

If I see the sun no more, I feel its heat ;
if I cannot gaze on the splendour of the
skies, yet when night is fair, I feel its
freshness.

They all grow old, the fairest wives.
Mine may be frightful, but then I see her
not !

The Blind Man

Years have followed years ; yet my wife,
for me, keeps all her charms.

I know not whether her locks be white,
her form bowed ; if her brow be furrowed,
her teeth fallen ; nor whether when she
laughs her lips lamentably hang down.

My wife, for me, has ever her starry
eyes ; for ever her hand has succoured me,
and I read not the falsehood on her face.

Married men should all be blind !

XIII

HISTORY OF KING TRIÊU-VIÊT

I BORE mine offering to Vong-Xuong,¹
whose heavenly palace is to be found
in the constellation Dao of the North.²

And I have descended to earth again so
that I may tell you the history of King
Triêu-Việt the holy.

O dwellers in Phù-Cam, ye must honour
the protecting genii, those who fought to
keep us the liberty of lacquering our teeth ;
but ye must also remember those who died
to save us from civil war.

The King Triêu-Việt is one of those.

He was a good and powerful king who
reigned over our ancestors.

But in his realm he had a rival ; 'twas
Ly-phat-tu.

¹ The Genie of Literature.

² The Great Bear.

History of King Triêu-Việt

This rival, that he might reign, would have shed all the blood of our ancestors.

He declared war against the good King Triêu-Việt.

And the good King Triêu-Việt was forced to fight that he might not seem a coward.

But he wept.

He wept for his dead warriors, and for those whose wounds were red as the flower of the hibiscus,

As the flower of the flamboyant.

He sent ambassadors to Ly-phat-tu praying for peace.

And, to ensure peace, Triêu-Việt gave his daughter in marriage to Ly-phat-tu,

And the half of his kingdom.

Oh, thank then the good King Triêu-Việt, who spared the blood of our ancestors !

Ly-phat-tu was not yet contented.

When the charms of the king's daughter began to lose power over his ambitious heart, he began the broil once more,

History of King Triêu-Việt

He raised an army and attacked the king's warriors.

And numerous were the wounded, numberless the slain.

Then the good King Triêu-Việt wept over those innocent victims.

He commended his country and daughter to the mighty genie,

And slew himself that peace might be sure.

Huyen-Vu himself came to seek his soul,
And bore it to the *thần*s in a chariot drawn by five winged dragons.

The deed of King Triêu-Việt is worthy to be noised over the whole earth!

XIV

THE RICE-GENIE (ÔNG-LUA).

HE is a gentleman dressed all in green,
like the Genie of the Tan-Vien.

His flesh is white as milk. On his head
he wears a hat decked with little bells.

And the bells tinkle in the breath of the
wind.

From morn to night he bathes his feet,
lest he be too hot.

I went to visit him to-day, and this is
what he said :

“ O blind man ! tell the sprightly child to
be obedient as I.

“ Bid the maiden be virtuous, bid the mother
be tender,

“ Bid the man be free-handed, the father
kindly.

The Rice-Genie (Ông-lua)

- “ I that am a Genie, I obey the hand of mortal man.
- “ I give him my life.
- “ He plants me where he will, and I permit him.
- “ He cuts me, grinds me, crushes me ; he cooks me, he eats me ; nor do I hinder him.
- “ Every day I bear this pain without complaint, that man may live and wax in strength.
- “ I am but a little gentleman dressed all in green ; yet, lacking me, the Annamite could not exist.
- “ When the bare-thighed planter-woman throws me into the furrow traced by the black buffalo, she is wont to sing.
I am happy in her toilsome joy.
- “ When I am grown, and the plumes nod over me, I shake the bells on my hat to show my pleasure.
- “ Man cuts me down ; as he cuts, he sings ; and I, I do not weep.

The Rice-Genie (Ông-lua)

- “ In the cool evenings, 'neath the thatched
roof, the mill is set a-moving. *Couic !*
Couic !
- “ 'Tis the paddy-mill moved by a pretty
maid, who chews betel the while, and
exchanges sweet words with her
affianced.
- “ I, I sing 'neath the pestle that grinds me ;
I sing well-nigh as loud as the pretty
maid and her lover.
- “ When the house-mother throws me into
her cooking-pot, she sings . . . or
scolds her turbulent sons.
- “ I feel not my torments, since I give my
life for the Annamite.
- “ I am a gentleman dressed all in green ;
my flesh is white, and my hat is decked
with little bells.”

This is what Ong-lua, the Rice-Genie,
said to me to-day at dawn.

XV

THE FAMILY

WHO is the mother of My Lord Tiger?
'Tis Madam Tigress.

Who is the mother of the *chon-cao*, the wild cat?

Again 'tis Madam Tigress.

Who is the mother of the panther?

'Tis still Madam Tigress.

And doth this amaze ye, O sons of our ancestors? Be not amazed at all.

When the flowers of the cotton-plant opened in the tenth month, Madam Tigress brought three sons to birth.

All three of them were alike, and Madam Tigress was vastly perplexed to know which was the eldest,

The eldest, who should keep up family worship.

The Family

She led them to the banks of the river. Then with a bound she sprang to the opposite bank, and anxiously awaited what her sons would do.

They looked one on another, all the three, and proceeded to caterwaul, demanding their mother.

But one sprang as he had seen her spring, and, with a bound, was across the stream.

He was My Lord Tiger.

The second fain would follow his brother.

He sprang, but fell amidst the waters, paddled awhile, and only by swimming reached the bank.

He was the *chon-cao*.

The third one, a coward, sniffed the liquid sheet, wetted his paws, and drew back, daring neither to leap nor swim.

He was the panther.

Thus it is in family-life with brothers and sisters, born of the same father, born of the same mother.

The one is fair, the other foul.

The Family

The one is big, the other small.

The one is strong, the other weak.

The one is brave, the other a coward.

The one is honest, the other a rogue.

The one is clever, the other stupid.

The one is generous, the other grasping.

The one is active, the other idle.

Say not, when a man does an evil deed,
“Such a one is of the Tran family, or of
the Mac.”

“Such a one is a Lé, or a Tri.” ’Tis an
injustice.

Is my brother a thief, I myself am but
a poor honest man.

And I have a right to your respect.

XVI

THE ROCK OF VONG-PHÙ

KNOW ye the Rock of Vong-Phù?
'Tis a great woman of stone, high on
the mountain-top,

Hard by Lang-Song.

When 'Triêu-tu-long went to war with
the hosts of the 'Tao, he took with him
a brave warrior—Vong-Phù.

And his wife, worthy of all admiration,
was Dai-Là's¹ daughter. Her name was
Thi-Vong.

Thi-Vong accompanied her spouse on the
war-path.

She followed the troops, despite the heat
of the seventh month, and although her
girdle began to grow heavy.

Her legs were torn with the cactus-

¹ Hanoï.

The Rock of Vong-Phù

spines, and her feet with the sharp pebbles strewn on the mandarins' road.

She walked through long days, and every night she gave her spouse her bright bosom for a pillow.

In all Triêu's army there was no warrior more valiant than Vong-Phù.

How otherwise? He had his companion's love!

.
But a day came when Thi-Vong was forced to tarry; for her hour was come.

She lay down in the soft grass, to bring her son to light.

And the army of Triêu-tu-long withdrew themselves.

When her son had opened his eyes on the light of day, Thi-Vong suckled him, and carried him on her hip.

Then she went up on the mountain-top to watch whether the army should return victorious . . . but above all to see her beloved spouse.

The Rock of Vong-Phù

Days passed by, and Vong-Phù came not back.

• • • • •
Thi-Vong nurtured her child, who became a man as valiant as his father.

But Thi-Vong gazed ever on the plain, watching whether her lord would come.

Wealthy men asked her in marriage, unable to believe that a woman young and lovely could live alone.

She repulsed them with horror.

Never did Vong-Phù return ; he died for the glory of the Dragon !

Thi-Vong stayed so long standing on the mountain that she became a rock. . . .

That rock, ye may behold it hard by Lang-Song. . . .

In those days there were faithful wives.

*(M. G. Dumoutier gives a different
legend about the Rock of Vong-Phù.)*

XVII

THE BAMBOO

EXCEEDING hot it was to-day, when
the sun blazed in the midmost
heaven.

And I laid me down beside the road,
because I was weary,

And because a screen of bamboos shed
there a slender shadow.

The great flies of velvety brown hovered
about me, humming in mine ears.

I slumbered. And while I slumbered,
the biggest of the bamboos, the Wise One,
spake thus to me :

“ During my life-time I am a graceful
tree.

“ My boughs clap together with a noise
as of rattles ; my foliage sings in the even-
ing breeze.

The Bamboo

“ But when I am dead, I am indispensable to the Annamite.

“ With me he builds his house.

“ With me he weaves his hat.

“ With me he fashions boats,

“ And tooth-picks.

“ He makes with me baskets and burden-carriers,

“ Couches and cradles, wherein the newborn babe sleeps in shelter from the mosquitoes.

“ With me, man warms himself; with me, shields himself from the heat, making shady shelters.

“ I am his dearest friend.

“ Take me away from Annam, and what will he do, the Annamite ?

“ But, for all that, the king hath not as yet rewarded my services.

“ Learn then a lesson from me, O son who listens !

“ Dost thou toil for love of thy children thou mayst perchance be thanked.

The Bamboo

“Dost thou toil for thy friends, maybe they will mock thee.

“Dost thou toil for the men thy brothers, perchance they will stone thee.

“Dost thou toil for the king, perchance he'll forget thee and let thee starve.

“Learn then to toil for thine own satisfaction.

“Thy peaceful conscience alone will give thee thy recompense.”

I awoke, for the bamboo spoke no more ;
and I am come, this autumn evening, to
bring ye the Wise One's counsel.

Forget not the Blind Man of Phù-Cam !

XVIII

THE RIVAL GENII

THIS morning the thunder roared. The storm-wind blew vehemently. Ye were frightened, O my sons !

For ye are wont to fear when the typhoon mows down, even as a rice-haulm, the mightiest trees of the forest,

When the arroyo overflows, when the river leaves its bed.

Ye do well to tremble : the wrath of the genii is at its height. Their stubborn resentment mounts to their brains, just as at times the mud rises to the surface of stagnant waters.

Ye do well to tremble. The genii use their might for evil, as for good.

I cannot—so numerous are they—reckon the generations which divide us from the time

The Rival Genii

when the King Van-Lang reigned over our ancestors.

He had a daughter so fair that all the genii loved her.

Son-Tinh, the Genie of the Mountain, and Thuy-Tinh, the Genie of the Sea, met at her palace-gate. They came, the pair of them, to ask the lovely princess in marriage.

Each looked on the other ; their eyes shot forth lightnings.

Together they went in before Van-Lang. But Van-Lang knew not how to answer them ; he had his daughter summoned.

When the princess entered the audience hall, Son-Tinh hid his evil mood with an agreeable smile.

Thuy-Tinh, since he retained his sour looks, frightened the princess, who chose the Genie of the Mountain.

O all ye who know unhappy love, most dear sons of mine, ye will feel Thuy-Tinh's despair,

Ye will know his jealousy.

The Rival Genii

He departed with hatred in his soul. He swore to be avenged, to ravish the young bride from her husband's love.

At his command the wedding-feast was troubled.

He caused to fall diluvian rains. The furious sea drove back the waters of the river, the river-waters those of the arroyo.

Great is the number of our ancestors who were drowned in those awful days.

Son-Tinh bore his bride in his arms to his father's house, the Genie of the Tan-Vien. He hastened up to the mountain-top, while the spreading inundation covered all the surrounding lands.

The Genie of the Tan-Vien took his daughter-in-law into his dwelling, and lent his son his own power.

Son-Tinh unchained the most violent winds, which drove back the waters.

Son-Tinh let loose the thunder amid the clouds; the flames of heaven set earth on fire. Earth shook, and was rent asunder.

The Rival Genii

Axes of stone sprang up from the ravaged soil.

The warriors seized upon them. They hurled themselves on the troops of Thuy-Tinh, and slew them in heaps.

Thuy-Tinh took refuge beneath the billows, who call him Lord.

Peace-bringing Time has not assuaged his eternal hate.

Ye know his anguish, O ye my sons, whose love was luckless.

As ye dream of your "belovèd sister," torn from you by one over-bold, so are there days and nights when Thuy-Tinh dreams of the beautiful princess.

Then he goes to war with his happy rival.

Ye do well to tremble, O my sons, when the typhoon breaks like a rice-haulm the mightiest trees of the forest.

When the arroyo overflows, when the river forsakes its bed, then the genii are fighting for their spouse.

The Rival Genii

Tis not for me, poor blind mortal, to sit in judgment on the conduct of two powerful genii; but think ye, O my sons, that it becomes them thus to strew the earth with ruins for a lady's lovely eyes?

Does your belovèd sister disdain ye, condemn her, forget her, and peace shall be yours.

XIX

SONG ON THE DEATH OF A YOUNG MAIDEN

I HAD my white teeth lacquered that I might win me
a husband.

Hou ! cha !

Did the Emperor of China know it, perchance he'd tear
them away !

Hou ! cha !

Thus sang one morning Thi-Teu the fair,
as she gathered the silk-worm's cocoons
from the mulberry trees.

Ye heard her, one and all.

She was joyous as the air was brisk, as
the banana was golden, as the bird was glad
of life.

A beauteous maid was she, loved by the
handsomest youth in all the land.

To-night the air is heavy. The bird is
sad, for the sky is dark. The banana has

Song on the Death of a Young Maiden

been trodden underfoot; and Thi-Teu is dead.

A serpent, green and rose-coloured, bit her in the heel.

No more will she sing, no more knot up her ebon tresses.

No more will she chew the betel which reddens the mouth and scents the breath.

Her eyes were like the mirror of calm waters in autumn, her eye-lashes lovely as hills in spring.

She is dead!

Her mother bemoans herself, saying:

“Whither art thou gone, young maid?

“Thou hast left thy mother, and thy betrothed who loved thee.

“Whither art thou gone?

“Who will guide my trembling steps when I shall be old?

“Who prepare my rice and tea?

“Thou art dead, who scarce wert born to life.

“’Twas but yesterday I carried thee on

Song on the Death of a Young Maiden

my hip, but yesterday that I gave thee the breast.

“Oh, my daughter!”

Dwellers in Phù-Cam, lament with me Thi-Teu the fair!

She is dead!

Tell me, O my brothers, is life so slight a thing, that a child, healthful in the morning, should be but a corpse at night?

Why should we love it, this transient life? Wherefore, O ye rich, should ye cling to your riches? Ye must leave them behind, as the poor must leave their rags.

Rather be free-handed and kind.

The remembrance of your largesse will live among the people long after your bodies shall have been borne, laid level, to their last abode.

I, the Blind Man of Phù-Cam, I shall remember Thi-Teu the fair; every day she offered me alms; and I will join my wailing with her mother's.

Song on the Death of a Young Maiden

I shall wail with the weeping women
who will follow her coffin.

May her soul find the nearest road to
Nirvâna !

XX

HONG-LO THE GIANT

I

PICTURE a chaos of the most diabolical rocks, shutting in a water, infinitely mournful . . . all lacquered in faërie fashion by a marvellous moonlight. Here is the Bay of Along, and here all the mystery, all the magic, of Indo-China.

In these uneasy waters sleeps a *thuong-công*, a fearful dragon, the harbinger—and perhaps the instrument—of celestial vengeance.

Only the Annamite of most spotless soul, only the purest virgin, dares approach after nightfall those wild shores haunted by the monster.

A lovely legend, however, is woven round

Hong-Lo the Giant

those infernal rocks, that concerning a son of Lac-Long and Au-ki; Hong-Lo, the giant.

Lac-Long, who created our ancestors, threw into the sea a bag holding fifty human eggs; while Au-ki, motherly and tender, hatched fifty others, thus dowering her children with those most precious qualities which were inherited by the Hung monarchs.

The bitter billows washed one egg into the hollow of a rock hung with mosses and sea-weeds.

The sun lent his kindly heat, and Hong-Lo was born. He was, in the beginning, a beautiful child, suckled by a hind with horns of gold. Then he became a splendid youth, then a man-god.

He had a great brow, locks "whose undulations surpassed those of the clouds,"¹ and eyes "which reflected the sun."

His strength was herculean. All the

¹ Poem by Nguyen-Du.

Hong-Lo the Giant

maidens of the Giao-Chi¹ were in love with him.

Hoan the fair, to win his favour, twined her tresses with flowers ; Liên danced divinely, swaying her hips, and pouting her marble breast.

Kim sang sweet songs with crystal voice ; others wept in silence, or died of love.

The giant had never loved mortal woman. He lived chaste, amid healthful Nature, feeding on fishes or on fruits.

Every night he spread his nets in the sea among the rocky hollows ; every morning gathered in frisky silver fishes.

By day he hunted, thus freeing the country from fierce beasts.

One morning he met in the woods a young tigress, with supple spine, with fell of tawny gold, who bounded away when he drew near.

He set off in pursuit. The young tigress

¹ *Giao-Chi* (spread-toes), name of the primitive Annamite tribe.

Hong-Lo the Giant

redoubled her speed and agility ; Hong-Lo grew desperate . . .

He ran, he leapt the ditches, he tore his face in the lianas ; he beat down back-handed the hindering trees, but did not succeed in seizing the tigress of golden fell.

The day declined. Hong-Lo was exhausted. He managed, notwithstanding, to drive the tigress into a cleft among the rocks.

Only a little dexterity—and the beast would be captured.

Hong-Lo waited a moment, then cautiously stole up to the rock. He drew near to a narrow fissure, and looked in.

He was amazed at what he saw. A very old woman—Au-ki, perhaps—lay stretched on a bed of fern, while the young tigress, standing upright, held half-opened her tawny fell. . . . She let it drop to the ground . . .

She was now a young maiden, “neither ugly nor beautiful,” but infinitely graceful and modest.

Hong-Lo the Giant

She knelt down beside her ancestress.

“Oh, grand-dame, how scared I have been!”

“How anxious, Sen, was I!”

“I was seeking thy food, grand-dame, and I met a giant who drove and pursued me.”

“Poor darling!—and ’tis for me that thou dost daily risk thy life! Heaven will reward thy devotion.”

“My devotion, grand-dame! ’Tis no devotion; I love thee. . . . But what art thou to eat? I have next to nothing . . . and the giant is hard by!”

“I will fast, my child. ’Tis not meet that the Princess Sen be recognized.”

. . . “Poor little princess!” she added, drawing down to her breast the young maiden’s head; “so young, yet so unhappy!”

“I’m not unhappy being with thee.”

“Ah, but thy wicked brother will kill thee if he discovers thee. . . . He has

Hong-Lo the Giant

shrunk from no crime that he may reign alone."

"He will not find me, grand-dame; I am well hidden. There is but this giant who chased me so madly. . . . Ha, ha! how droll it is! He thought to pursue a tigress!"

"And if he had hurt thee?"

"He would not have hurt me. Had he taken me, I should have thrown off my hairy dress. . . . 'Twas therefore I was so alarmed. I am glad not to have been reduced to such straits. . . . This giant runs fast, grand-dame, but I run faster than he. . . . Fain would I know whether he is gone!"

Sen thrust forward her head to the rift in the rock. Hong-Lo hid himself in a bush.

He could still see the maiden who, thinking him gone, went fearlessly to and fro.

"Thou wilt have but a little rice to-night, grand-dame. I could not bring thee the fruits that I wished to gather."

Sen waited respectfully on her ancestress.

Hong-Lo the Giant

When the ancient woman had finished her meal the little princess ate what was left ; then, weary with her long race in the sunshine, stretched herself on a heap of dry grass, and fell asleep. . . .

Then the giant went his way.

But every evening he returned.

Long would he gaze on the maiden, frail and wan, caressed by a moonbeam amid her slumbers. . . . Then, when this lovely vision no longer sufficed him, he grew bolder, and went thither by day ; but was careful to hide in the thickets near by.

Sen would appear on the heights of the rocks, clad again in her tawny fell. And Hong-Lo was glad at once, and grieved because he knew the young tigress's secret.

The princess, every morning, was amazed by a fresh surprise. She found near her cavern beautiful fish, enclosed in a net of twisted lianas, savoury fruits, quarters of venison, or cakes of gluey *nep*.

Hong-Lo the Giant

And every day with fervent heart she thanked the unknown good genie who cared for her.

II

Meanwhile the maidens of the Giao-Chi pursued the giant with their attentions.

After repeated rebuffs they took counsel together. Up spake Hoan :

“ Since the giant will have none of us for a wife, 'tis that he loves a woman in secret.”

“ We must know that woman,” answered Liên.

“ I hate her !” cried Kim in savage tones.

“ Not more than I !” said Liên.

“ Not more than I !” cried angry Hoan.

The daughters of the Giao-Chi are very cunning when they love.

They spied on the disdainful giant, and discovered the princess's retreat.

One night, while Hong-Lo was spreading

Hong-Lo the Giant

his nets, they laid in wait for Sen, and seized upon her. With cries of victory, they tore off her tiger-skin covering.

Hoan made a grimace :

“ Fie ! she is not beautiful ! ”

“ She’s too small,” said Liên.

“ Her mouth is too large, and her lips over thick,” chimed in Kim.

“ No matter ! Since Hong-Lo loves her, she shall die ! ”

In vain did the princess assure these wicked wenches that she knew nothing of the giant’s love. They surrounded her, led her to the sea-side, bound her hands and feet with rattan-withes, and hurled her into the deep.

.

All night Hong-Lo, devoured with anxiety, sought in vain for a glimpse of the maiden.

Helpless and heart-broken he listened to the grand-dame’s wailings.

Day dawned. The force of habit—

Hong-Lo the Giant

or the will of the genii—impelled the giant to the sea-side. He drew up his nets.

What was his amazement, his grief, to find, wrapped in the close meshes, the white body of little Sen !

He seized the princess in his arms, tried to warm her with his breath, to revive her with his caresses.

Since all was in vain, he lifted up the maiden, and bore her into his dwelling, sheltered from the winds, where, that he might tend her the better, he laid her on the bed of sea-weed and moss.

The murderesses beheld with scorn the youth's pathetic care.

When he gently replaced the princess in the net, and raised her on his shoulder, they clung to the meshes, and let themselves be dragged, adding all their weight to the giant's burden.

Hong-Lo went painfully. He sprang from rock to rock, sustaining with sinewy

Hong-Lo the Giant

arm the enormous weight, and feigned not to perceive the presence of the guilty women.

Having reached the midst of the Bay of Along, and set his foot on a great rock, he suddenly shook the net. The wretched girls, losing hold, fell into the water, and were instantly snapped up by the crocodiles.

The movement cost Hong-Lo a prodigious effort—the girls were heavy with hatred—and his foot sank deep into the rock.

Aided by good and powerful genii, Hong-Lo was so fortunate as to bring the princess back to life, and she rewarded him with her hand.

They loved each other as people loved in those happy times ; as nowadays they love no longer.

They took the good grand-dame home to them, and lapped her in tender care. She had thus the joy of beholding her grand-

Hong-Lo the Giant

daughter's sons, strong and handsome as their father, sweet and loving as their mother.

Sen's brother, the wicked Cao, did his best to recapture his sister; but when he came down to the shore the *thuong-cuong* seized and devoured him.

.

Possibly you doubt the truth of this wondrous adventure? Only go to the Bay of Along, when the moon, fabulously brilliant, seems to quicken the fantastic rocks.

As Phù-Io showed it to me, so to you will be shown the gigantic imprint of Hong-Lo's foot.

The breeze which rattles, with sword-like clashings, the stiff foliage of the palm-trees, will bring you the confused lamentations of the maidens of the Giao-Chi, who seek still for eternal rest.

Perhaps, in the faded emerald sky, you will see standing out the profile of the

Hong-Lo the Giant

redoubtable dragon, or fancy you catch a glimpse of the Princess Sen gliding between the rocks. . . .

Then you will doubt no longer, but, like me, believe in the legend.

XXI

BA THE BUFFALO-HERD

To my Daughter

I

BA was a happy child. His father possessed a bright mansion on the shores of the Lagoon of Lang-Câu, a garden enclosed by a hibiscus hedge with blood-red flowers, and a herd of buffaloes, which a little servant, night and morning, led down to bathe.

Often would Ba, like a lithe little serpent, creep along by the hedge. He would squat down beside the herdsman, and watch for long hours the singular troop, whose horned heads could alone be seen on the surface of the blue water.

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

He would listen, enchanted, to the herdsman's tales, fantastic stories of the *Ma*, stories old as Annam itself.

He learnt to distinguish the *Ma-Ra*, the water-genii, from the *Ma-Xo*, the genii of the mountains and forests. In order not to displease the spirits, Ba always spoke of them most respectfully as "*Ong-Ma*," as who should say "My Lord the Devil."

But, better than his bright mansion, better than his black buffaloes, better than all the marvellous stories, Ba loved his pretty Mamma.

For she was very beautiful, and (what is more) very kind, that Mamma of his.

Tall and very slender, she was always smiling with her red lips and pearly teeth.

She smiled, polishing her rosy nails ; she smiled, jingling her rings and bracelets ; she smiled, brushing her long locks . . . so long that they could not be entirely con-

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

fined in the “cai-cân,” but a tress must ever escape to caress the slim, amber-hued neck.

She smiled still, playing with her darling son. She knew pretty songs, soft, lulling songs.

To hear his Mamma sing, Ba would go to her, pretending to be very sleepy, and the young mother would take the little one on her knees.

She would murmur in a crystalline voice :

“Bô’ng, bô’ng, bâng !
Sleep, my child, sleep in mine arms !”

Then, dreaming aloud :

“Sleep, my child, my well-beloved Ba, blossom that Buddha let fall from Paradise. I love thee.

I love thee, for thou art life of my life, blood of my blood.

I love thee, for thou art fairest among the children of Annam.

I love thy bright eyes, thy long silken lashes.

Sleep, sleep, my little one !

Like a frolicsome kitten dost thou play with the golden beads of thy mother’s necklace ; thou laughest, showing thy tiny white teeth.

Bô’ng, bô’ng, bâng !

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

The sun is burning, at its height. He is weary, my son,
even as the young palm-tree, whose brow grows heavy
under the storm-wind's caress.

Bô'ng, bô'ng, bâng !

When thou art a man, wilt thou not be good? Thou wilt
give rice to the wretched, and stretch forth thy hand to
lead the blind man across the brook.

Bô'ng, bô'ng, bâng !

Be the benediction of the Tiên on thy head, O my son !
May happiness spring up under thy feet !

May thy mother weep all tears away, leaving none for her
son to shed ; O mighty Buddha, watch over my son !

Bô'ng, bô'ng, bâng !"

Ba ended by going to sleep, and his mother
sat still as a statue lest she should wake
him.

Little Ba was a happy child.

II

Then he was a most unhappy one.

Two autumns went by, and a genie entered
the bright mansion.

He brought the fever. That wicked fever
struck down the pretty Mamma.

Poor little Mamma ! She shivered for
three days, and then died, so that she might
go to Nirvâna.

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

One cannot, alas! take one's children to Nirvâna; one must go thither alone.

And Ba was left to his grief.

He wandered about like a soul in pain, everywhere seeking his Mamma's pearly smile, and finding it no more.

A day came when his father brought home a second wife.

Anxiously Ba looked at her. . . . Had his Mamma come back?

No; for this second wife was fat and coarse, and talked very loud, in a shrill voice.

She scolded early, she scolded late.

Ba was very much frightened, and hid himself in the darkest corners.

One day the stepmother dragged the child roughly from his hiding-place.

"Lazy-bones!" she cried, "what dost thou there? Go loose the buffaloes, and lead them to the lagoon!"

Ba was amazed. This was work for the

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

servant, and not for him, the eldest son of the house.

His stepmother soon tore him from his reflections; brutally she thrust him out, pulling with all her might at the little tuft of hair which his mother once plaited so lovingly.

Ba went down to the lagoon.

Ba, from that morning, was a herder of buffaloes.

He went out at dawn, carrying with him a little rice.

He endured the oppressive heat of day. No longer had he that sweet mother-bosom to sleep in . . . and he cried bitterly, did poor Ba.

At night the stepmother made him sleep with his buffaloes.

The kindly beasts drew close to him, and licked him gently with great red tongues. . . . Then Ba climbed on the back of one among them, stretched himself out on the warm

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

croup, and went to sleep, wearily, with dreams full of sobs.

He was very wretched, little Ba. Why did his Mamma not come to fetch him? With her, he would be so happy!

Ba envied a little sister dead before his own birth; Thi-Hai must be with their joyous, smiling Mamma. . . .

But where were they?

In the dark forest where the lianas flourish?

In the clear waters of the lagoon?

In silver moon or golden sun?

Ah! if he knew but where to find them, how soon he would set off!

One night Ba was weeping in dreams, as was his habit. The buffalo on which he lay felt the little body start. All unconscious, the child leant over . . . was about to tumble. The buffalo foresaw the fall, and tried to prevent it. The good creature's clumsy movement brought about disaster; one of the steely horns pierced

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

the sleeper's belly, wounding him mortally.¹

The blood flowed, hot and crimson, even as the tears had flowed, burning and limpid. Ba suffered no longer.

Ba was happy ; he had gone to his pretty Mamma.

But Buddha avenges the innocent.

In the self-same place where the blood flowed and the tears dripped, the mighty god made a spring gush forth.

The spring ran through the garden, and poured itself into the lagoon, bathing the roots of the hibiscus.

It flowed, it warbled, the shining spring, on its bed of golden pebbles, saying in its own tongue :

“ Be thou accursèd, O cruel step-dame !

¹ The young buffalo-herdsmen of Annam practise the dangerous habit of sleeping on the croup of their favourite beast. When disturbed by an insect, the buffalo will move hastily to get rid of the nuisance, and the boy is often disembowelled by the sharp horns.

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

“Be thy sufferings sevenfold greater than those thou didst inflict on the little Ba !

“Be thou accursèd ! Thy daughters shall deride thy wrinkles, thy ruined teeth, thy tow-like¹ hair, thy skin harsh as a crocodile’s !”

The stepmother, hearing the song of the brook, fled away in terror.

Then the hibiscus plants, one and all, shook their blood-red blossoms.

“Be thou accursèd, O heartless woman ! Thou shalt survive thy sons, and remain alone like the yellowing leaf left hanging on the tree, whose green leaves have fallen first.”

The turtle-dove cooed, “Be thou accursèd !”

And the bat, by night, brushed the evil woman with its black wing, crying in its scrannel voice, “Be thou accursèd !”

¹ A curse peculiarly terrible in a country where white hairs are held in special veneration.

Ba the Buffalo-Herd

III

Amid the cool shades of an ideal Nirvâna, Ba lies asleep in his mother's bosom.

Tenderly, as of old, the young matron murmurs in her musical voice :

“ Bông, bông, bông !
Sleep, my son, sleep ! ”

XXII

THSING-KOU

I

IN the time of the Duong, when the Son of Heaven bowed Daï-Là and Phu-Xuan beneath his sway, there stood, north of the river Nhi-ha, a certain village, where dwelt a marvellously beautiful maiden : Thsing-Kou.

A rich mandarin, who wished to marry her with his son, obtained permission, after the old custom, to see his future daughter-in-law " bared of all veils."

The young maid came at her father's command.

Throwing off with lofty gesture the last garment which covered her, free of false shame as of immodesty, she showed her virginal body.

Thsing-Kou

The mandarin was dazzled.

Never had he beheld so many assembled perfections.

Enchanted, he admired the long silken tresses, the brilliant eyes, the dainty mouth, the dazzling teeth, the firm breasts faultlessly modelled, the hips wide as those of a mature woman, the gracefully formed legs—the fingers, above all, with their patrician nails, and the tiny feet . . . so tiny that Thsing-Kou, to keep a precarious balance, had to lean on the shoulders of two serving-women.

The old mandarin realized what a “source of felicity” such a spouse would be for his son; and the marriage was agreed on.

It was celebrated with all the usual pomp. Thsing-Kou took leave of her mother with the “customary lamentations.”

When at last the rites were concluded the procession set out for the nuptial dwelling.

Thsing-Kou

Alone in her palanquin, the young wife was shaken by fear.

“What is he, my destined husband? Is he handsome? Will he be kind?”

Thsing-Kou was no less virtuous than fair. Knowing her duty, she vowed before her ancestors to die rather than stain her honour, which was theirs also; that of the illustrious family she was leaving, and the family no less illustrious which she was about to enter.

She would give herself to Kouan-Tu, and be ever faithful to him.

.

The cortège stopped. The journey was done.

The palanquin was placed in the most retired chamber of the dwelling.

The kinsmen and friends withdrew, expressing their good wishes for the youthful husband's happiness.

Despite all Kouan-Tu's confidence in the paternal taste and penetration, he stood

Thsing-Kou

hesitating a moment ere he detached from his neck the miniature golden key which was to open for him the conjugal paradise.

She was his wife, this Thsing-Kou, his first, much-honoured wife, who—it was to be hoped!—would ere long give him his eldest son, followed by many another. . . .

What if this wife were not to please him?

Kouan-Tu was a judge of fair women. He was an assiduous frequenter of the most famous tea-houses, the most sumptuous flower-boats. . . . Was Thsing-Kou beautiful indeed?

His hesitation did not last long. With feverish haste he detached the golden key, opened the door of the palanquin, and stretched forth his hand. . . .

Thrice did Thsing-Kou prostrate herself; then arose with a movement full of grace and nobility.

Oh, a beautiful wife! . . . Kouan-Tu, like his father, stood dazzled before so many charms.

Thsing-Kou

II

For two years had Thsing-Kou been a happy wife.

Her son could walk alone, and warble pretty words.

For two years, Kouan-Tu, much in love with his wife, had forsaken the flower-boats.

One day a relative came to visit him, a young man from the Nam-Giao district, who as yet knew but little of town or of life.

Kouan-Tu resolved to accompany him to the tea-house, and there leave him in the hands of certain old friends, who would undertake the amusement and instruction of the young country-cousin.

The evening passed off in pleasant fashion. Kouan-Tu thought no longer of the wife "beautiful as a silver bar" who awaited him in the family dwelling.

Kouan-Tu smoked, Kouan-Tu drank, Kouan-Tu was soon completely intoxicated.

Thsing-Kou

The smoke, the laughter, the alcohol, the perfumes, the contortions of the dancing-girls excited his senses. Kouan-Tu grew crazy.

A voice reached his ears amid the sounds of music and of lively conversation :

“ ’Tis said, O Kouan-Tu, that thy wife is the most virtuous of all the ladies here in town. Is this true ? ”

“ Without the slightest doubt ! ”

“ Knowest thou that virtue is genuine only by dint of being put to proof, and of triumphing ? . . . Has Thsing-Kou known temptation ? ”

“ But . . . but . . . ”

“ Has Thsing-Kou escaped that temptation which ‘ makes the feet of women trip ’ ? Thou canst not believe in her fidelity ! Come then, agree to a trial ! Three among us will go to thine house, and seek to seduce Thsing-Kou. If she resist wit, beauty, and strength, then art thou the happiest husband in all the Celestial Empire ! ”

Thsing-Kou

Kouan-Tu was fearfully drunk ; he agreed to the singular suggestion.

III

The night was calm, the sky was clear. The moon shone resplendent, and the warm air was balmy with all the scents of spring. A roseate snow fell from the flowery plum-trees.

Thsing-Kou had long retired to the nuptial chamber, but had not doffed her garments.

Seated by an open-work shutter, Thsing-Kou watched sadly the garden-path by which her spouse would come. She heard the song of the boatmen grow distant down the silvery stream.

From time to time she rose softly, and went to gaze on her sleeping babe, then returned once more to her seat of marble and ebony.

Most heavily did the hours weigh on her loving heart.

Thsing-Kou

Why was Kouan-Tu so long away ?
Had any evil befallen him ?

Thsing-Kou started. . . . She thought she heard footsteps in the house.

Her husband, doubtless, had entered by the little door. . . .

Joyfully the young wife went to meet him she loved. She lifted the curtain over the entrance ; but started back in horror. . . .

The man before her was not Kouan-Tu. . . . Yet it was no robber ; for, by the light of the painted linen lantern, she recognized a neighbouring mandarin, A-Hong, the subtle man of letters—A-Hong, whose brow had been haloed by the genii in the Temple of Literature.

What had he to do so late in a strange dwelling ?

A-Hong drew nearer.

“ Most noble Thsing-Kou, permit thy least worthy servant to terminate thine anxiety. Thou awaitest thy spouse, who

Thsing-Kou

comes not home. I hasten to announce that he is, nevertheless, in excellent health."

"What dost thou here, O A-Hong?"

"O fair Thsing-Kou, thou full-blown lotus, thou who in beauty and grace soarest above all other mortals, I come hither to tell thee that thy husband, despising thy charms, is at this very moment debasing himself with the vilest of dancing-girls. . . . Dost not weep nor wail? Oh, thou dost well indeed! The being who shares thy bed is unworthy of thee . . . and this pains me grievously, who love thee. Yea, Thsing, love thee with all my soul! I love thy matchless body, thy spirit, the sister of mine own; I love thy pure and haughty heart. . . ."

"Away with thee, wretch! Little knowest thou Thsing-Kou! Didst thou know her, thou wouldst cut out thy tongue sooner than speak such words!"

"Be not cruel, O Thsing! . . . I love thee; I will make thee forget the wrongs done thee by thy faithless spouse!"

Thsing-Kou

“Back, villain, back! Touch me not if thou lovest thy life!”

Splendid in her wrath, the young wife seized a poniard which lay within reach of her hand.

A-Hong retreated, but with arms still outstretched, crying:

“Be mine, O well-belovèd! . . . See how exquisite is the night! The plumes sport amorously on the rice-plants; the tigress in the forest calls to her lord. . . . Thou art young, thou art fair . . . and thou wilt lie alone till day, while voluptuousness pants in the air, and flows with the blood through every vein. . . . Be mine own!”

Thsing-Kou sprang on the tempter with lifted weapon. . . .

A-Hong's arm was pierced through and through.

The man grew pale with pain, and fled, pursued by the woman's imprecations.

.

Thsing-Kou

Once more 'Thsing-Kou sat by the open-work shutter. Her bosom heaved violently, her eyes brimmed with tears.

“ O Kouan-Tu, why tarriest thus? Didst thou but know what pain is mine !

“ Is it true that thou sportest with dancing-girls ?

“ Ah, how the thought wounds me ! Am I then ill-favoured, thy first wife ?

“ What wouldst say, didst thou know how thy dwelling is desecrated by a false friend ?

“ O Kouan-Tu, come, come to me ! A strange languor has hold on me. . . . Why spake he of voluptuousness, that accursèd ? Hath he cast on me a spell ?

“ Return, dear husband, to guard thy wife ! . . . Oh, joy ! . . . 'Thou art come ! ”

Once again 'Thsing-Kou sprang forward, only to stand still, trembling and motionless.

Not yet had the master come. 'Twas the handsome Shang-Ky.

Shang-Ky advanced slowly, smiling with

Thsing-Kou

all his snowy teeth. His eyes shone like carbuncles.

“O fair Thsing-Kou, forgive my boldness! . . . I can keep my secret no longer; I adore thee! I have loved thee so long! The dawn each day brings thy name to my lips, and each night I dream. . . . I dream of the boundless bliss that I would fain give thee, that thou couldst give me. . . . Be sweet to my heart, O my scented flower!”

“’Tis mine to warn thee, O Shang-Ky! Back—or thou leavest not this house alive! I’ll deal with thee as the worst of robbers!”

“What, and wilt thou be deaf to the voice of my love? O Thsing-Kou, fairer than the white moon, and as resplendent, know that thy husband loves thee not. Hear me . . . believe me. . . . O Thsing, thou art fair, fairest of all; and I, I also am fair. . . . Yield thyself! We shall be the splendid pair envied by the very gods!”

Shang-Ky fell on his knees, and, with

sacrilegious hand, endeavoured to lay bare the young matron's little foot.¹

His attempt was cut short. . . . 'Thsing-Kou, whitening at the outrage, seized her dagger, and plunged it up to the hilt between the shoulders of the villain—who fell dead.

.
Thsing-Kou stood horror-struck. Was she not prey to a cruel nightmare?

Was it possible that two mandarins, rich, envied, and esteemed, could have abased themselves to a deed so shameful as the seduction of a wife in her husband's absence?

What had she done, she, 'Thsing-Kou, that such disrespect should be shown her?

What unconscious coquetry could have attracted such gross tribute?

Reason good to hang the head!

And yet, perchance, she did but dream. This frightful thing was but delusion! . . .

¹ The worst outrage that can be inflicted on a Chinese lady.

Delusion?—What of that corpse, convulsed by the last spasms of the death-agony?—the corpse of the all-too-famous Shang-Ky, full, an hour since, of life and passion, now stretched in tragic stiffness. . . . That, indeed, was no dream.

Footsteps resounded on the tiles of the verandah; and the curtain was lifted abruptly. Thsing-Kou's terror culminated at sight of a third apparition.

One like Hercules stood before her. Him too she recognized.

"Twas Tuong-Binh, her cousin's husband—to her almost a brother.

"O Tuong-Binh, what dost thou here? What terrible tidings dost thou bring me? Where is my husband? What hath befallen him? Why lies he not by my side on the marriage-bed? See now, shameless men have come hither . . . dared to speak of love! I have wounded one, and slain the other. Tell me, O Tuong-Binh, where is he, my dear husband? If thou art here,

Thsing-Kou

at this hour, 'tis because thou knowest somewhat. . . . Doubtless thou art come to help me?"

"Yes, I come to thee, my little flower. I know thou art woeful!"

"Kouan-Tu, then? . . ."

"Is basely betraying thee!"

"Go seek him! He'll leave all when he learns . . ."

"Thou hast no need of him, my fair one! I—I am here!"

"Thou? But thy wife awaits thee! Who knows whether she, she also, struggles not amid perils like these of mine?"

"Let her struggle, her also! I defend her whom I love!"

The young wife sprang back from the Hercules.

Tuong-Binh stretched out his arms, and, embracing his cousin, covered her with passionate caresses.

"My flower! Oh, thou wilt be mine . . . mine at last, by force or favour!"

Thsing-Kou

Too long have mine eyes endeavoured not to behold thy charms—mine ears not to hear the music of thy voice . . . thy joyous laugh that maddens me! Each day when I am far from thee is long as three autumns.

“I can struggle no longer. Thou shalt be mine—I will it!”

“Away, O Tuong-Binh! Away, I implore thee! Thine is a two-fold insult. Remember, thou art of mine own family . . . ours are the same ancestors . . . and thou dost outrage them!”

At that moment, the child awoke. Frightened, he began to cry.

With a superhuman effort, the mother tore herself from the brutal grip of the mighty man.

“Sleep, sleep, my little one!”

The child smiled trustfully, and slept, calmed by his mother's breath.¹

Once more Tuong-Binh tried to seize

¹ The Oriental kiss.

Thsing-Kou

the young wife, who defended herself with vigour.

The Hercules, in the struggle, tore away a whole breadth of her embroidered robe.

Maddened with shame, 'Thsing-Kou drew forth the golden pin that fastened her hair, and plunged it into the eye of her enemy.

Like a wounded wild beast, 'Tuong-Binh fled howling.

IV

'Thsing-Kou prostrated herself.

“O great *Thât* ! Mighty one ! Look on the misery of thy servant !

“Mine was a husband who loved me ; he loves me no more !

“Mine was a stainless fame ; 'tis tarnished by impure desires.

“Mine was a lovely and innocent son. That son has beheld his mother in the arms of a man who is not his sire.

“My wifely robe is sullied with human blood . . . 'tis rent, and the wrenched-off

Thsing-Kou

fold may serve as trophy to him who will boast of having defiled my honour.

“O great *Thât*! Thou didst give me a lofty soul; now take it to thee again, for I will not be deflowered by slander!

“Pure was *Thsing-Kou*, and pure she will remain, as she vowed before her ancestors!”

Calm, and divinely lovely in the shade of her dark, dishevelled locks, *Thsing-Kou* drew near to her son.

She gave him a last caress, and, with untrembling hand, drew forth the dagger from the wound of the handsome *Shang-Ky*. She cleansed it carefully, so that she might not be forced to endure the contact of unhallowed blood . . . and plunged it into her haughty heart.

Thus *Thsing-Kou* attained *Nirvâna*.

v

The great Tribunal learnt later the heroism of the wife, the crazy cowardice of the husband.

Thsing-Kou

Kouan-Tu was adjudged guilty of his wife's death, and sentenced to be beheaded; a disgraceful punishment, whose effects endure beyond the grave.

The soul of Kouan-Tu must wander through all eternity.¹

.

If some day you should visit the village to the north of the Nhi-ha river, close to the dwelling made illustrious by Thsing-Kou, you will find at the entrance, on the Mandarin road, a piously tended triumphal arch.

The gilt characters, which stand out from a vermilion background, make known that this arch was erected

“IN HONOUR OF CHASTITY”

Thsing-Kou's son begot numerous descendants.

¹ The souls of the decapitated seek in vain for eternal rest. They are the *Mâ-cut-troc* (spirits cut short) which are specially to be dreaded.

Thsing-Kou

The worship of the divine ancestress will never come to an end.

Phù-Io added : “ And, although she was a Chinese lady, the Annamites acknowledge her virtues, and offer up sacrifices to her honour and glory.”

XXIII

TEA

I

BODHI-DHARMA¹ had been wandering for long years.

He had climbed the steepest mountains, crossed deep rivers and tumultuous torrents.

He had vanquished weariness, cold, heat, and hunger.

Lions and panthers, meek as lambs, prostrated themselves before him; alligators wept with emotion when they beheld the holy bodhisattva² pass by.

Dharma, having left the shores of the Ganges, reached the Celestial Empire, and presented himself before the Emperor Ming-Ti.³

¹ Bodhi-Dharma, or Dharma-rajā, a Hindu patriarch, known in China by the name of Tâ-Mô.

² Bodhisattvas are those who have attained the highest degree of perfection. After a last birth, they die, attain Nirvâna, and become perfected buddhas.

³ About A.D. 75.

Warned by a prophetic vision, Ming-Ti had awaited the great bonze for seven years. He received him with feelings of the profoundest reverence; and Dharma continued his predictions. He announced the coming of the Buddha.

He extolled the joys and the peace of the future Nirvâna, towards which every soul should aspire.

He expounded the "Four Excellent Verities," and all the "Good Ways" which the Buddhist must know, in order to attain supreme perfection by the most rapid paths.

Dharma preached by example. His life was filled with prayer, labour, study, and meditation.

When joyous Aurora flung back the veils of Night, Dharma went his way.

He went by mount and valley, a knotty staff in hand, bowed by the burden of numerous years, his brow, heavy with deep thoughts, bent towards the ground.

To all he brought the good tidings, each

day more emancipated from the toils of Samsara.¹

Little by little, nevertheless, Dharma shortened his daily journeys, for his legs became weak and tremulous.

Ming-Ti, moreover, the Son of Heaven, had prayed the venerable ascetic to translate the sacred books of India into the Chinese tongue.

Obediently Dharma set to work. Every day, bent over the sacred manuscripts, he transcribed the mystical characters. It was a gigantic task; but Dharma's virtue and courage were not baffled.

At twilight, after a slight repast, Dharma began his nightly meditations.

Petrified in perfect stillness, his long hands joined, his eyelids lowered, the Most Sage opened the "eyes of the soul" on perfect felicity.

Nothing could interrupt these sublime soarings, neither song of birds, nor howling of

¹ The material world which the Buddhist must contemn.

Tea

beasts, nor rain, nor wind, nor crash of thunder.

II

Dharma had known hunger, and despised it ; he had known weariness, and overcome it ; he had escaped victorious from fleshly temptations ; he had endured the cold of Himalayan winters and the burning languor of sultry summers.

But Dharma knew sleep, and sleep overthrew Dharma.

In the midst of a glorious ecstasy, Dharma slumbered.

When he awoke, the sun, high already above the horizon, seemed to reproach his unworthy weakness.

The birds twittered gaily, and Dharma believed them ironical. . . .

He abased himself, with brow in the dust, and conjured Heaven to take pity on him.

That he might win pardon, Dharma redoubled the fervour of his prayers, the rigour of his mortifications.

Tea

On that day Dharma worked with greater ardour at the sacred translations ; his mind was alert, and the holy work appeared to be accomplished as by miracle. . . .

When the shadows of night enwrapped the world with their denseness, Dharma again took up his yesterday's meditation—the meditation so unhappily interrupted. Oh, confusion ! Once more Dharma fell asleep !

When he awoke, the grief of the Most Sage was boundless. . . . He would have despaired, could a bodhisattva admit despair. . . .

What could be done to prevent accursed slumber from vanquishing the powerful will ?

What could he do to remain awake, despite the fatigues of his lengthy apostolate ?

What, to continue without interruption the pious exercises of an ascetic exceeding pure ?

Tea

How forbid his heavy eyelids—oh, so heavy!—to close, and extinguish the lights that came from above?

All at once a sweet smile blossomed on Dharma's pallid lips—a smile that lit up the faded face and the pain-stricken eyes.

Dharma had found the way!

With perfect simplicity—with that heroic courage inspired by mysticism—Dharma cut off his eyelids, and threw them to the ground.

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The Tiên ¹ had pity on Dharma, and resolved to reward his heroism.

The eyelids of the Most Sage took root suddenly in the soil, even as a fruitful seed. That blood-stained seed germinated during the night; and a graceful bush sprang from the earth.

.

His meditation finished, Dharma passed by the spot where yesterday he threw down his

¹ Heaven.

Tea

eyelids. He lowered his mutilated eyes. . . . The eyelids had vanished ; but in their stead Dharma perceived the beautiful bush born of their substance, born of his own blood, his conquered flesh, his victorious spirit.

"Twas a splendid plant, with tufted leaves, with fair, white scented blossoms.

"Twas the first tea-tree.

Dharma stood dazzled by this incredible marvel. . . . And the Mighty One spake :

" O Dharma, thy sacrifice was pleasing to me, even as thy holy meditations.

" Soon shalt thou attain Nirvâna, soon become a perfected buddha.

" While thou yet tarriest, that slumber break not thy divine contemplations, eat of the leaves of the miraculous tree ; no more shalt thou succumb beneath the burden of daily toil.

" Thy body shall be strengthened, thy spirit of clearer vision.

" Be the grace of Heaven poured down

Tea

on thee in floods, O my most illustrious son ! ”

Dharma obeyed. He ate of the shining leaves, and sleep departed from him for ever. His body became robust, his spirit strangely luminous.

The Emperor Ming-Ti heard ere long the marvellous tidings. He went to pray to the most holy Dharma, and to gaze on the divine herb.

Ere he returned to his palace, Ming-Ti gathered some of the leaves, which he bore away with him. With these magic leaves he had a beverage prepared. This beverage healed his stomach, which was sluggish and dilapidated.

Then the Son of Heaven issued this famous decree :

“ Henceforth, as soon as departing winter permitteth the buds to burgeon, the earliest leaves of Tea shall be culled for the Emperor of China ! ”

This decree remained in force under

Tea

Ming-Ti's successors. It was the origin of the Imperial Tea-gathering.

Dharma died heaped with honours and blessings ; but before his death he had the happiness of beholding—his last earthly reward !—on the sunny slopes of the Chinese hills, the tea-plant growing and infinitely multiplying.

Popular belief desires that, in the Buddhist paradise, Dharma be seated to the left of Sakya-Muni, amid the sacred *lohans*.

(This legend, of Chinese origin, has been “ adopted ” by Annamite believers.)

XXIV

THE SENSITIVE PLANT

I

THE quaint little rosy blossoms always excited my interest. Their nervous stems make uneasy movements like those of human beings.

I was dreaming by a tuft of this fairy plant, vainly wondering what enigma—or what lesson—might there be hidden.

A few paces away, Phù-Io, squatting on the steps of the caï-nha,¹ was watching me, with an ironical gleam in his slanting eyes. I questioned him.

He arose respectfully, with a supple movement. Then, a superstitious fear in his guttural voice, which softened now and then, he told me this story :

¹ House built of straw or loam.

The Sensitive Plant

There were very fair maids in the ancient land of Nam-Việt; and none was fairer than Thi-Trinh.¹

Thi-Trinh, small and dainty, had great dark eyes in a little pale face.

Those great bashful eyes were often veiled by the long lowered lashes. Those great eyes looked on nothing in life save what was loveliest, purest, and best; and were ignorant of aught besides.

Thi-Trinh was a poor fisherman's daughter. Every day she went through the village, *ganh*² on shoulder, to fetch water or sell fish; but, while her companions went coquettishly, with bold looks darted at the young men, with provoking, crafty, or witching smiles, Thi-Trinh the modest walked lightly, avoiding the dirt with her slender feet.

Never, indeed, were they soiled, those

¹ *Trinh* in Annamite, like *Thsing* in Chinese, means the state of purity or chastity. The sensitive plant is called “*cay-trinh-nu*,” flower-maiden pure.

² Weight-carrier, bamboo yoke.

The Sensitive Plant

pretty slender feet, never was stained the *cai-ào* of common stuff, never was the black hair disordered.

Exquisite cleanliness was Thi-Trinh's only elegance.

But, if the little *congaïe* never looked boldly about, others looked much on her.

The men found her to their taste, and more than one offered her, of his own free-will, the betel and areca-nut of betrothal. . . . They began to ask of her father that he should give her in marriage; but he guarded her carefully. Thi-Trinh remained a virgin.

Among the maiden's admirers the most assiduous—perhaps the most impudent—was the son of the mandarin, the Huyen¹—Binh, who was nicknamed Xinh; that is to say “the dandy, the Adonis.”

He was perpetually to be found where Thi-Trinh passed by.

At first he gazed on her with unfeigned

¹ Chief of a province.

The Sensitive Plant

surprise. So a girl of the people could be genuinely beautiful? Then desire came upon him.

The son of a mandarin does not long desire a poor maiden. He beholds her, covets her, and possesses.

The handsome Xinh was vaguely aware that he would not thus easily win Thi-Trinh.

He saw her delicacy and refinement through her coarse garments; he divined her intelligence, despite her artless air. He began his advances with a certain civility.

“Good-day, little one! . . . Is not the burden thou bearest too heavy for thy shoulders?”

“My shoulders, Thine Excellency, are accustomed to the *ganh*.”

“Yet art thou very young to be inured already to fatigue . . . very young, and very fair; dost know it?”

“Fair or foul, I must work, for my father is poor.”

The Sensitive Plant

“Poor, with such a treasure? Thou art jesting! Many a youth I know would give much to thy father, would he permit thee to be his wife.”

“My father will dispose of me as he pleases, since I belong to him. . . . But let me go my way, O Thine Excellency; it grows late, and I have no time to lose.”

“What a strange maiden!” thought Xinh; “she is proud as a princess.”

Next day, and the days after that, Xinh awaited Thi-Trinh on the road.

The maiden walked with rapid step, and saluted the mandarin with a gracious reserve, but did not tarry. She seemed not to behold the looks, ardent and amorous, fixed upon her.

Xinh was more and more amazed. He was not treated in this haughty fashion by the other village maids. . . . Less than ever did he think of taking action as master, as despot, who must needs be obeyed.

The Sensitive Plant

One morning he dared to walk by the side of Thi-Trinh. The path was narrow ; every moment Xinh drew nearer, brushing against the maiden, who moved hastily back or forward that she might avoid contact with the handsome youth.

“What darest thou, little wild one ? One would think I frightened thee !”

“By no means, Thine Excellency ! But I know the respect I owe thee, and the distance there is between us. . . . And I maintain it !” said Thi-Trinh, lifting to him her glorious eyes, where a spark of malice mingled with an adorable candour.

“Dost act thus with other men ?”

“Yea ; for I am wife to none. It pleases me no better to be soiled by audacious hands than by the mud of the street !”

Xinh had expected no such reply, and stood tongue-tied. The maiden went her way alone.

Xinh began to dream about the lovely

The Sensitive Plant

Thi-Trinh. Slumber fled from his eyes. If, worn out with fatigue, he ended by falling asleep at dawn, Thi-Trinh appeared to him in visions, mocking and inaccessible.

He hid himself now to watch her pass, not daring to meet the great eyes where one might read so many things.

He lost his appetite, lost all pleasure in scenting and adorning himself.

The Huyen observed his son's woeful condition, but knew nothing of its cause.

He thought that this big boy who was so bored must be married at once, and decided to find him a wife.

Xinh let it be done, wedded his cousin with great pomp, and . . . went on thinking of Thi-Trinh.

More than ever did he dissemble in order to gaze at will on the little *congaïe*, for he dared not excite his wife's jealousy. . . . And yet how willingly would he have given the majestic *bà*,¹ dressed in showy silks,

¹ Annamite lady.

The Sensitive Plant

decked out like a buddha with gems and gold necklaces, for one kiss from the poor maiden who sold fish in the village market !

How was such a fancy to be satisfied ?

Had Thi-Trinh been of less lowly birth, he would have taken her as concubine, since he had his spouse of honour, and possessed the right to several wives ; but a girl of the people could not belong to him in any such fashion. . . . And Thi-Trinh was too proud to accept his caresses without being lawfully his.

II

Spring came. The rainy season had freshened the earth ; the woods were rejuvenated with new vegetation.

'Tis in spring that Love, the God of Five Arrows, is at his fiercest.

Xinh went aimlessly forth for a morning walk. . . . 'Twas certainly the roguish god who guided his footsteps, for, all unheeding,

The Sensitive Plant

the mandarin approached the lagoon, where Thi-Trinh's roof nestled amid the bamboos.

Ere long a melodious voice came to charm his ears ; Thi-Trinh was singing.

And sweet it was to hear.

Grave and soft, the divine voice broke into fits of artless passion, tremblings of distracting tenderness.

Ravished, he listened. . . . Long after the song had ceased, he remained beneath its spell.

A rustling of boughs set him quivering ; Thi-Trinh, invisible but a moment ago, stood before him.

She recoiled on perceiving the mandarin. Trembling, with wild eyes, he stretched out his arms to the maiden.

She would fain have fled, but it was too late. Strong arms embraced and strained her slender waist, her rounded hips.

Burning breath beat on the little face with its great dark eyes—those great eyes

The Sensitive Plant

which would not look on evil—and they dilated, filled with inexpressible fear.

Thi-Trinh reeled.

Xinh supported the lovely form, which gave way inertly. All at once he uttered a gasp of unspeakable terror. Thi-Trinh was dead !

.

Mad with love and grief, Xinh fell on his knees by the little corpse, fair and fine as though of wax.

He longed to give the young *congaie* a supreme caress ; but his lips met only . . . a tuft of rosy flowers amid pretty lace-like leaves.

Those flowers, those leaves shrank from his profaning breath.

Thi-Trinh was dead, but the Sensitive Plant was born. . . .

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Only since that day, beside the narrow paths of Annam, has the Sensitive Plant

The Sensitive Plant

drawn back from the slightest stranger touch.

“Death rather than dishonour”—such is the motto of this proud and modest floweret.

XXV

THE MOON-STONE

I

THE King Ly-huê-tong, sick and faint-hearted, had abdicated in favour of his daughter. Chiêu-Thanh was anointed Queen of Annam. She was the first woman to bear the title, that heavy burden, by right of birth.

Chiêu-Thanh was a lovely and very gentle princess. She had long eyes of jade, and a complexion of pale amber.

She composed elegant poems which she sang divinely. Artfully could she arrange branch and bloom in the great vases of crackle porcelain ; but her heart quivered when she thought of the blood poured out by her warriors on many battle-fields.

Little Chiêu-Thanh would have made an

The Moon-Stone

exquisite wife and a very bad warrior. And yet, in those troublous, heroic times, a queen should have had a "heart all in bronze cuirassed."

The old King found the task too hard of guiding his realm with this little weak, timid daughter. He counselled her to choose a husband.

Suitors were not lacking, for the territory of Nam-Viet was fertile, and the Queen fair.

Amongst them Chiêu-Thanh chose Thân-Canh, nephew of Trân-thu-do, because he was the most brilliant cavalier ever beheld.

Thân-Canh was strong and brave, but rashly and ambitious.

Scarcely was he the Queen's consort than he seized the reins of power, drove away the ministers, and forced the old King Ly to retire into the country.

Chiêu-Thanh, like a docile wife, let him do as he chose ; but great was her grief when forced to be parted from her father.

Often, at times when her absence would

The Moon-Stone

be least observed, she had herself borne, in her red palanquin, to visit the august old man.

And already King Ly had to dry the tears which fell from the little Queen's eyes, for Thân-Canh was a gambler and unfaithful. He did not restrain himself from the maddest orgies with his captains.

The captains feared him, but all were not evil. The youngest among them, Khanh-Linh, felt a respectful pity for his unfortunate Queen. Often, amid the feasts and debaucheries of the palace, he would sit mournfully dreaming. . . .

Thân-Canh rallied him, and—to please the King—the other officers jeered at him.

II

Meanwhile Ly-huê-tong, dispossessed as he was, disquieted the Trâns, who feared an uprising of the Annamite people in favour of the old dynasty.

Trân-thu-do went to visit the ancient

monarch. He found him in the courtyard of the pagoda of Thuyên-Giao.

King Ly was pulling up the weeds which disfigured the masses of pinks.

“A fine occupation, that, Your Majesty!” said the visitant.

“And is it not a good work to remove these weeds that choke the flowers?”

“’Tis a fine occupation, I say again without jesting. The young plants must have needful room wherein to grow and blow. ’Tis, moreover, what has been ever your custom . . . since your daughter reigns during your life-time. . . . But know you not that these weeds you pull up will grow again, stronger and mightier, if you take not heed to destroy their roots? . . . even to the weakest . . . even to that which appears half-dead already, deeply buried in the earth!”

“What is your meaning?”

“My lord and master knows it better than I.”

The Moon-Stone

“ Would you give me to understand that my death is required by my country ? ”

“ The country will know true peace only when the factions have no longer occasion for revolt.”

“ I comprehend, O Trâm-thu-do ! Depart, for you hide the sun from me ! Old men love the light, the heat, and the truth.”

A few days after his conversation with the astute Trâm-thu-do, King Ly was found hanged on the boughs of a rose-wood tree.

Chiêu-Thanh's grief was unbounded. Unable to endure the noise of festivity, she fled to hide herself in the gardens, amid the thickest groves. There, without constraint, she sobbed as though her heart would burst. . . .

Her tears ran down her childish face, and fell into her red silken handkerchief—the appurtenance of her sorrowful dignity—and she did nothing to dry them up.

Times there were when the complaints that

The Moon-Stone

poured from her lips took on the sweetness of a song :

“ A Queen’s life is a web of stinging sorrows.

My woe begins with the day and ends not with it.

My heart is weary, and as it were broken with so much sorrow. Mine eyes are two wells of living waters.

Wherefore am I not the sower of rice? . . .

She, she is happy !

She sings at her work, and when her day is done, her spouse goes forth to meet her.

They go together by the ways bordered with sensitive plants and cactus, pressed the one against the other like a pair of turtle-doves.

Wherefore am I not the young maiden with purple bodice, who sells tea and broth to the coolies?

She gives and takes merry jests with the youths her customers.

She has her mother for confidant.

The good King Ly is dead. Oh, how great is my grief !

I am but a woman, and cannot offer him sacrifices worthy of his nobility.

I am all alone in this palace peopled by over a thousand.

Wherefore doth the branch that the wind hath broken hang lamentably on the tree? Dry are its leaves that drink no sap. Were it not better cut away?

Wherefore does death not come and take me?

Good King Ly is happy ; he is among the genii. Fain, fain would I be with him !”

The young captain Khanh-Linh, hidden amid the bosky thickets, heard the complaint of the fair Queen with eyes of jade. . . .

The Moon-Stone

Ah! how fain would he have dried those precious tears! How fain have gathered them up like so many pure diamonds!

A day came when Chiêu-Thanh let fall her little silken handkerchief. Khanh-Linh picked it up.

He would have taken it to the Queen, but could find no means of approaching her.

He hid the handkerchief in his tunic, and kept it till evening against his breast.

When Khanh-Linh had retired to his chamber, he reverently took the morsel of silk which had drunk the royal tears, and spread it out under the pallid moonbeams.

Very great was his emotion. He fell on his knees, and worshipped in ecstasy the little Queen, so deeply, so unjustly wretched.

Oh, miracle! All of a sudden the tears were crystallized. . . . The little handkerchief, in the twinkling of an eye, was starred with drops limpid as crystal, iridescent as opals. . . .

They twinkled in the starlight, they

The Moon-Stone

twinkled, the lovely drops, till Khanh-Linh was dazzled. . . .

By the light of those magic tears the youth saw clearly into his heart ; he loved his Queen !

At first he was frightened by this audacious sacrilege ; but then he reflected that this love, so well concealed, could do no hurt to Chiêu-Thanh. So he drove it not away.

When Khanh-Linh was on duty near Thân-Canh, he had the bearing of a man very sullen or very sad. . . . Thân-Canh ended by hating him.

III

The death of Ly-huê-tong did not appease Thân-Canh's ambition. He longed to be King in title as well as in fact. Chiêu-Thanh was a hindrance to him.

He thought at first of poisoning her, which would have been a radical method of riddance ; but he feared a revolt of the

The Moon-Stone

populace, who had a special affection for the Ly dynasty.

He decided on a species of *coup-d'état*. He repudiated the Queen, and chose a second wife, whom he wedded with great pomp. And, in order to show of what small significance was Chiêu-Thanh, he despoiled her of all her jewels.

Chiêu-Thanh resigned herself to this humiliation. Long since disillusioned, she loved no more the husband whom she despised.

She was relieved that she need feign no longer a joy which she did not feel, and that she could withdraw from the dissolute court. Nevertheless, she was saddened by the loss of her jewels. She was a woman . . . she was young . . . and she loved the milky lustre of pearls on her skin's clear amber, the fire of diamonds in her locks. . . . The loss of these lovely things was to her more affecting than the deprivation of royal honours.

Thân-Canh would fain have proclaimed

The Moon-Stone

himself King, but knew not how to set about it, since the Queen was not dead. . . . Ah! had Chiêu-Thanh not been so chaste he might have convicted her of adultery, slain her, or publicly declared her fall. . . .

All at once he was seized by an inspiration. Why should he not marry that Queen, ever sad, ever in tears, to that ever-sullen captain?

A fine couple, verily!

The one would weep "bent to the right," the other weep "bent to the left"; 'twould be delightful!

And the sad Majesty laughed, discovering his long teeth, and wrinkling his slanting eyes.

Such a marriage would be tantamount, for the Queen, to a final forfeiture; as wife of a simple captain, she could henceforth pretend to no dignities.

He sent word to Chiêu-Thanh, he sent word to Khanh-Linh, and made known to them his will.

The Moon-Stone

Khanh-Linh believed not in his good fortune, and scarce dared glance at his royal bride.

Chiêu-Thanh bowed her head, thinking :

“What new infamy is this? Doubtless 'tis a fresh method of torturing me!”

In an impulse of revolt, she drew herself up. At last she would cry out to her unworthy spouse all her hatred, all her scorn! She would show she was of royal blood, nobler than her tormentor!

And . . . her eyes met the eyes of Khanh-Linh. . . .

What she read in those soft looks staggered her.

Here was the self-same flame she had seen in the eyes of the young coolie, as he wooed the maid in the violet bodice.

Here, the ecstatic expression of the bonze in the pagoda, worshipping the genie Tran Vũ.

Here, the tenderness that shone in the looks of the rice-sower's husband.

The Moon-Stone

Here was all this, and more besides; for the love of Khanh-Linh, reverent, delicate, and ardent, had passed through the crucible of pain.

And Chiêu-Thanh the Queen spoke no word to Thân-Canh. . . .

She bashfully lowered her eyes, that none might know her thoughts, and accepted the hand of Khanh-Linh.

That self-same day the strange marriage was solemnized. That self-same day Thân-Canh proclaimed himself King.

Thus ended the Ly Dynasty.¹

IV

Night had spread her veils over all Nature. The palace, filled with feasting, was brilliantly illuminated. The new King and Queen were seated on the throne, decked with Chiêu-Thanh's splendid jewels. The orgies were about to begin.

¹ A.D. 1225.

The Moon-Stone

Most tenderly did Khanh-Linh, pressing his wife in his arms, lead her from the accursèd spot.

They went through the gardens, skirting the fountains and flowering shrubs, passed the gates, and found themselves ere long on the road to Thuyên-Giao.

Certain faithful servants attended them, and conducted them to the old King's little dwelling.

Chiêu-Thanh no longer wept. Her eyes of jade shone resplendent, and her lovely lips blossomed into a smile.

So happy was Khanh-Linh as to appear completely transfigured. None would have known him.

"Oh, my Queen!" he cried; "my Queen Chiêu-Thanh, mine own Queen! You whom I so well have loved, whom I yet shall love so well, accept the humble existence I proffer you! Better than any other you know that happiness dwells not always on the steps of the throne. In this little

The Moon-Stone

house, where we shall dwell hidden, we shall share the felicity of the gods !”

“ I believe you, I believe you, Khanh-Linh, for I love you !”

“ Ah, wherefore, belovèd wife, can I not lap you in riches, that you may not regret overmuch those that you have lost ?”

Despite herself, Chiêu-Thanh raised her hands to her throat, and grew wan thinking of the stolen necklace wherewith she loved to adorn herself; but, recollecting herself swiftly, she stretched out her arms to her husband.

“ Your love, O Khanh-Linh, your love will stand me instead of both riches and jewels. All will I forget to think only of love !”

Khanh-Linh smiled. He drew from his tunic an exquisite trinket formed of strange gems, limpid as crystal, iridescent as opals.

“ I give you back your tears, O Chiêu-Thanh, my adored one ! . . . Your tears that I gathered up, that were transformed

The Moon-Stone

by the genii. When you behold them, so brilliant about your graceful neck, may you remember that your woes are ended, and that your husband treasures you more than aught else in the world !”

Chiêu-Thanh was vastly surprised, but exceeding glad ; for . . . she was a woman . . . she was young . . . and she loved jewels well-nigh as much as love. . . .

v

The chronicles tell no more concerning the last daughter of the famous Ly line. Happy people have no history.

But in Annam, where moon-stones are sometimes found, the people love to remember that these are the “happiness-tears” of Chiêu-Thanh the Queen ; and they are cherished as fetiches having the power to drive away adversity.

XXVI

THE PEARL¹

I

THE Golden Tortoise, that mighty magician, gave to King Yen-Dzeuong of Aù-Lac a talisman, precious exceedingly in those days of warfare and revolt.

This talisman was no other than a claw of the Golden Tortoise, wherewith the King caused to be fashioned a wonderful bow, which made him invincible and invulnerable.

All the kings, his neighbours, envied him the miraculous gift. Many strove to steal it away from him by force or by fraud—but without the least success. Among the envious was one Dà, lord of the northern lands.

¹ A historical legend, from the notes of R. P. Legrand de La Liraye.

The Pearl

He was a man greedy of riches, who would fain have ruled over the whole earth.

His son, very handsome, very strong, and very cunning, was named Trung-Thuy.

Yet more than his father did Trung-Thuy covet the talisman given by the Tortoise.

He betook himself to Yen-Dzeuong's court, had himself presented, made the customary presents, and asked, as a signal favour, to serve among the guards of a monarch no less able than renowned.

Yen-Dzeuong, the too-confiding, granted the young man's prayer.

Never was warrior more docile, adroit, and valiant. Soon the King made him a captain.

Thuy henceforth might enter the palace at will. He was exquisitely courteous alike to mandarin and servant, and won ere long the love of all the King's household.

One night, alleging affairs of state, he penetrated into the monarch's private apartments. He sought everywhere the en-

The Pearl

chanted bow, but found it not among the arms hanging on the wall.

He lifted up a curtain, thinking that it must conceal a yet rarer treasure; and beheld, indeed, the lovely Princess Mi-Chaù, asleep on a couch of finely plaited rattans.

Most adorable was the maiden.

Fixed to the spot, Trung-Thuy gazed admiringly on the gracious, rosy face, the long eyelashes softly shading the rounded cheeks, the dark tresses which, scattered abroad, half-concealed the dainty breasts.

Stealing in on the night wind came the scent of the lemon-trees and the faint, far-away sounds of a bamboo flute.

And still she slumbered, the little Princess Mi-Chaù.

The silver moon pierced through a cloud, and shone divinely on the maiden. Beneath the moonbeam's caress the rosy cheeks paled to the hue of pearl.

Trung-Thuy drew nearer.

The Pearl

He fell on his knees by the virgin couch
as though before an idol.

The night calm was abruptly broken by
the strident cry of the *kakké*.¹

And the Princess awoke.

She almost died of fear when she beheld
a man at her feet.

But Trung-Thuy was so humbly bowed
down, was so young and handsome, that she
regained courage.

“Who art thou? What dost thou here?”

“Oh, most noble princess, I am Trung-Thuy, son of King Đà. I heard tell of thy beauty, and, without knowing thee, I loved thee. That I might be near thee, I came to serve the King thy father; and to-night, Princess, to-night, 'tis mine to bow myself before thee.”

“Knowest thou that if the King saw thee he would slay thee?”

“I should die happy, having beheld thee!”

¹ Or “gekko,” a large lizard whose cry may be imitated by the staccato syllables “kakké.”

The Pearl

“I desire not thy death. Never has prince given me so great a proof of love. . . . Never a one would thus have braved the King’s anger to look on me. Valiant art thou, O Trung-Thuy !”

“I love thee, O Mi-Chaù ! For thee will I do deeds of prowess, if thou wilt bow thine eyes on me.”

. . . From the little bamboo flute came a mocking trill like the laugh of a blackbird.

“O son of King Dà, I will pray my father to give thee to me for spouse !”

“O Mi-Chaù, thou worshipful princess, to thee I consecrate my life ! As the star Kien-ngú is joined to the star Chuc-ngú, so may we be ere long united !”

“To-morrow, O Trung-Thuy, I will cause my teeth to be lacquered, and together we will chew the betel of betrothal. Depart now in haste, for near me thy life is in danger.”

“I’ll do thy bidding, O Mi-Chaù, my

The Pearl

well-beloved ! Henceforth am I the humblest, most fervent of thy slaves ! ”

Fiercely did the cries of the gekko rend the pure night ; and, on the outskirts of the forest, a tiger howled lugubriously.

II

King Yen-Dzeuonng could refuse his daughter nothing. He accepted the suit of Trung-Thuy. Magnificent was the marriage-feast.

Trung-Thuy received honorific titles of at least “ ten characters,” but the gentle Mi-Chaù gave him the sweeter and simpler name of “khanh-vuong,” king of happiness.

He dwelt in the palace with his spouse. He was happy . . . but forgot not the Tortoise’s bow, and desired yet more warmly to possess it.

One night, when the moon illumined the nuptial chamber, when the breeze was full

The Pearl

of sweet odours, and the King's musicians played on the flute, Trung-Thuy awakened Mi-Chaù.

"Dost remember, dear wife, a night such as this?"

"That remembrance is for all time graven on my heart."

"Dost thou love me indeed, O princess, with all thy soul?"

"Why askest thou this? Have I not given thee proofs of love?"

"I desire one greater yet."

"A greater? There's no such thing!"

"There is such a one, O`Mi-Chaù! Thou wert thine own, thou didst give thyself, and 'twas but natural. . . . Thus does a maiden of the people give herself to him she loves."

"What can I do more?"

"Show to me the Tortoise's bow, that I may touch it, and become invincible as the King."

"That were sacrilege!"

The Pearl

“ I know it, O Mi-Chaù, and I pray thee to commit it for love of me.”

“ Canst not without this believe in my love ? ”

“ Nay, Mi-Chaù. I must have a love immense and unparalleled, ready for any sacrifice. Didst thou love me thus, thou wouldst fain know me invulnerable as the King, so that in case of war I might return ever victorious and unwounded.”

“ The wars are happily over.”

“ They may break out again.”

“ Oh, 'tis fearful ! Hold thy peace ! ”

“ What wouldst thou do, O Mi-Chaù, if my duty tore me from thy bed ? ”

“ How could such a thing be ? ”

“ Woman, knowest thou not that our country requires such sacrifices ? ”

“ I know, alas ! that kings and princes must fight leading their warriors.”

“ And thou wouldst let me do thus without shielding me with the protection of the sacred Tortoise ? ”

The Pearl

“Oh, never did I consider this! What, thou whom I love, thou mightst be wounded . . . slain, perchance?”

“So small a thing is needed to keep me from such ill-hap!”

“True. Come with me.”

Mi-Chaù arose, and led her husband down certain long corridors, to a door hidden under a device of carven wood.

She touched a spring, and the door opened. The young wife, followed by her husband, descended some steps leading into a dark chamber.

Without faltering she went to a chest of “lim” wood, opened it, and showed—at last!—the wonderful talisman.

“Behold, O Trung-Thuy! Touch the golden claw, and thou wilt be invulnerable; but promise me never to use thy power against the King, my father!”

“And wherefore ask such a promise? Is not the King Yen-Dzeuong infinitely

The Pearl

mighty, since 'tis he who holds the bow ? ”

“Thou sayest well.”

The Princess held out the precious weapon. Under cover of the darkness Trung-Thuy detached the golden claw, and replaced it by one of yellow metal he had prepared.

The husband and wife returned to their chamber ; and, since Mi-Chaù was somewhat remorseful, Trung-Thuy made her giddy with loving words and drunk with caresses.

Very weary, she fell asleep at dawn to dream of fearful wars and a great bloodshed.

III

Awhile later, said Thuy to his wife :

“ My beloved, a courier with nimble feet is come to announce that my father, King Dà, lies very sick. I go to visit him, but shall soon return.”

The Pearl

“ I go with thee, O my dear one.”

“ I thank thee for thy infinite kindness, but I must not expose thee to such fatigues. The way is long to the lands of the North. We must cross rivers, torrents, and high mountains ; lie in forests frequented by tigers and elephants. Nay, Mi-Chaù, I must refuse thy loving offer. Alone I must go. Yet I would fain bear with me a kind word of thine, which shall aid me to endure the fatigues of the way and the anguish of separation.”

“ O Thuy, my husband, take me with thee ! Destiny unites the stag to the hind, and the hind follows the stag across the forests, fearing neither tiger nor elephant.”

“ Increase not, O worshipped wife, the pain I feel at parting from thee ! . . . The times are troublous ; thy sire deals unjustly with the folk of the North ; I must go to appease them, as to care for my father. . . . Stay with thine own, awaiting me. . . . Fare thee well, O Mi-Chaù ! Wedded

The Pearl

love can ne'er be broken. . . . I shall come back, fear not."

"O my spouse, would that thou wert returned already! . . . Life far from thee will be too bitter!"

"Be wise, O Mi-Chaù, be courageous as becomes a king's daughter and the wife of a prince royal! . . . Yet all things must be thought on. . . . What if I were parted from thee by armies of foemen? . . . If I were forced to seek, weeping, the trace of thy footprints?"

"Thou scarest me, Trung-Thuy! . . . But I would be brave," so said Mi-Chaù with ravishing smile. "Ever will I bear with me the down of the white swan. . . . And, should these horrors come on us whereof thou speakest, by each cross-way and crooked path I will throw a little down into the thorny thickets. . . . 'Twill be easy for thee to trace my steps."

"Thou, O Mi-Chaù, art the best and faithfullest of wives. I shall go less sadly,

The Pearl

having thy promise. . . . I will find thee once more or die."

"Thou wilt find me again, O husband, and find me ever-loving. . . . From this moment I shall await thee. . . . Farewell!"

IV

Scarcely had Trung-Thuy reached the court of King Đà than he assembled the captains, and said to them :

"Aù-Lac is ours. Follow me ; soon shall ye win costly garments, and baldrics covered with brilliants. Every day shall be passed in festivities, in games of skill and delicate banquets ; every night in the joys of love. Our last repulse shall be repaired, our dead avenged, and we the mightiest people among the Giao-Chi."

And war was declared.

Mi-Chaù knew not the cause of the quarrel ; she cursed these matters of policy which she did not comprehend, which forced

The Pearl

her to side now with her father against her husband, now with her husband against her father.

The sorrows of separation blanched her visage. She passed her nights in tears.

King Yen-Dzeuong, trusting in his talisman, stood firm, and awaited his foes.

He ascended the mountain, and searched the horizon to discover from what quarter the foreign army was penetrating into his kingdom.

Trung-Thuy led on his hosts with eagle swiftness; he had no doubt which way to take; for, since his father King Đà possessed the chariots of Chù-cong,¹ he made use of them to guide his army.

As soon as Yen-Dzeuong perceived the numerous hosts of the foreigners, he raised his bow, kissed it reverently, and drew the string. . . . The bow snapped with a noise as of thunder.

His warriors fled in alarm, and dispersed

¹ Magnetic chariots, which always pointed to the south.

The Pearl

amid the forests, coward-like abandoning their king.

Then Yen-Dzeuong saw that all was lost, and he betrayed.

He called to Mi-Chaù, invoked the genii, and sprang on his swiftest steed.

He took up his daughter behind him, and fled, abandoning to the victor his palace and his riches.

He reached Nam-Hai by the ways least easy to find. First he went straight on, then took the left-hand, returned on his traces, went to the right, plunged into the heart of the forest, traversed the high brush, and climbed the hills, which he descended with the speed of a waterspout.

The steed went panting, with bruised nostrils and bloody bit. . . . And, despite that giddy race, the old monarch heard the hoof-beats of his foemen's horses ever drawing nearer.

When King Yen-Dzeuong had reached the sea-shore his courser fell dead,

The Pearl

The beach was deserted. The luckless man beheld not the boat wont to lie at anchor in the little port.

. . . And Mi-Chaù, all along the way, had thrown the white swan's down at every cross-road. . . .

King Yen-Dzeuong despaired ; his enemies were approaching.

He prostrated himself on the strand, and invoked the Golden Tortoise.

This latter appeared in gorgeous pomp, sustained by the mighty Dragon.

“O King Yen-Dzeuong, thou hast borne thy ill-luck behind thee on the back of thy steed ! 'Tis thy daughter. Slay her, and thy country shall be delivered !”

“My daughter ! Can it be ?”

Mi-Chaù fell on her knees before her father. “O King ! forgive me ! The faith I swore to Trung-Thuy misled me. Slay me as the Tortoise commands !”

And, since Yen-Dzeuong hesitated, the courageous woman spoke on :

The Pearl

“What matter if a branch be cut off so the trunk remain whole?¹ My blood alone can wash out my guilt.”

“Be swift!” said the Tortoise.

The King raised his great sabre in form of a flame, and cut off with one blow his daughter's head.

Then a rhinoceros appeared, took the King on his back, and bore him away overseas, while a gigantic oyster gluttonously drank the blood of Mi-Chaù.

The Tortoise touched the oyster, and the blood was changed into pearl.

Trung-Thuy found on the yellow sand the mutilated corpse of the poor princess; and so was deluded love avenged, for the traitor loved his dead wife more madly than he had feigned to love her living.

He joined the dainty head to the slender body. The rosy cheeks were irised with a warm pearly hue, as of yore when caressed by the Planet of Night.

¹ Nguyễn-Dù—poem by Tuy-Kiên.

The Pearl

Trung-Thuy, disconsolate, took in his arms the lovely corpse, and, with heart-rending cries, bore it to Loâ-Thanh, where he gave it burial.

On the self-same spot was raised a pagoda in honour of Mi-Chaù.

Day and night the soul of the guilty husband was rent with remorse. He slept not, ate no food, left his locks untended. So miserable was he, that one night, exquisitely lit by the silver moon, when on the soft airs came stealing the scent of the far-off lemon-trees, and the mocking trills of the bamboo flute, he threw himself into the well of Tang-Lac.

v

When an Annamite finds a precious pearl on the yellow strand, he hastens to lave it in the well of Tang-Lac, that he may give it a more perfect lustre, a richer hue of the Orient.

XXVII

THE ORCHID

(*To Madame Suzanne Paul*)

I

HAVE you never dreamt, my charming lady, when you tastefully arrange your precious orchids in a glass of clearest crystal—have you never thought that this singular flower might have its own story?

This story was told me down yonder, in its mysterious native land, when dying day trailed its purple mantle over the pointed peaks of the Annamite hills. And here it is:

King Hung IV was on the throne. It was hundreds and hundreds of years ago, but womanly wiles already existed.

They had put on flesh in a graceful form, and went by the name of Hoa-Lan.

The Orchid

To depict Hoa-Lan were no easy task. She was changeful as a vernal sky, and shifting as the sea.

Her eyes were coaxing, languishing, sullen, wild. Her hair was dressed artfully, never twice alike. Her waist was supple. Her nervous feet—never at rest—seemed well-nigh a spirit's in their agility.

All for love of Hoa-Lan, Kiên-Phù chased the finest gold, and carved the milky jade ; Hoa-Lan laughed with all her pearly teeth, decked herself with the jewels . . . then turned on her heels.

Ngôyen-Ba sought out fresh properties in indigo, and discovered that rich violet tint which so well became Hoa-Lan's rosiness ; Hoa-Lan wore only *cai-àos* of that colour.

Gié-Dang brodered brilliant flowers on stuffs woven with thin thread from the silkworm's cocoon.

Công-Lê inlaid ebony with mother-o'-pearl.

The Orchid

Maï-Dù distilled the scents of flowers.

To all Hoa-Lan promised great happiness, with her wicked, coaxing eyes, her gracious sphinx-like smile . . . but gave her light heart to none.

And Kiên-Phù, despairing, threw himself into the Red River.

Nguyễn-Ba wildly withdrew into a cleft of the mountain.

Gié-Dang lost his sleep, Cuông-Lê his reason. Maï-Dù brewed, with the souls of the most evil flowers, a subtle poison which delivered him from his pain.

Nevertheless, the God with Five Arrows was determined to punish Hoa-Lan the coquette ; he made her fall in love.

He whom she loved was the handsome Mùn-Cay.

Aurora, casting aside her light misty veils, could see Hoa-Lan on her couch of mats and broidered silks. . . . And Hoa-Lan dreamed of Mùn-Cay. . . . The name of the loved one hovered on her crim-

The Orchid

son lips like a butterfly pillaging a rose.

When she awoke, Hoa-Lan went down to bathe in the lagoon; then she made her toilette, painted and perfumed herself, put on her finest jewels, and waited to see Mùn-Cay pass by. . . .

And Mùn-Cay passed, indifferent and disdainful, by the house of Hoa-Lan.

Days succeeded to days. Very long did Hoa-Lan find the hours of waiting, and brief indeed the moments when she beheld the object of her desire!

A day came when she went to Mùn-Cay, and declared the passion that consumed her.

Mùn-Cay began to laugh, and told her his heart was fixed elsewhere.

Hoa-Lan ran mad. She rent her hair, and tore her face with her nails.

. . . Of a sudden she remembered the genie of Mount Tan-Vien, who was said to be all-powerful.

The Orchid

On a fearful night of great darkness she set out alone and trembling.

Lightning furrowed the firmament, and rain fell in torrents. Hoa-Lan shivered in her soaking garments.

She reached the foot of Mount Tan-Vien, whose triple summit pierced the storm-clouds.

The dragon that guarded the entrance of the subterranean chamber was fearful to behold ; his eyes and his jaws darted forth flames.

Hoa-Lan humbly prayed him to let her pass ; and he did so. The cavern where the maiden entered was peopled with owls, which gazed on Hoa-Lan with their great wild eyes. Serpents crawled over her pretty bare feet.

Hoa-Lan went up to the onyx throne of the genie, and prostrated herself before him.

“All-Powerful, I am in pain,” she said, “and I come to pray thee for relief.”

The Orchid

“What ails thee?”

“I love Mùn-Cay, who loves me not.”

“Thy woe is well deserved. Hast thou not caused all who loved thee to suffer?”

“O genie, do with me what thou wilt, but grant me Mùn-Cay’s love!”

“Away with thee, O evil woman!” cried the genie, while his single eye blazed with anger: “never shalt thou have the love of him thou lovest; ’tis the just retribution of infuriated Kamâ!”

Hoa-Lan went despairing away.

At the entrance of the gulf a goat-footed *con-tinh* (sorceress) crossed her path.

She laughed, shamelessly showing her ruined teeth and withered throat.

Hoa-Lan shook with fear.

“Lovely maiden,” said the witch, “thou art unhappy, and I know wherefore. Wilt be avenged on Mùn-Cay, who will never love thee? Sell me thy soul, and be assured that Mùn-Cay will ne’er belong to another woman!”

The Orchid

Hoa-Lan considered . . . and agreed to the infamous bargain.

The *con-tinh* took a banana-leaf. She cut a morsel of it into the shape of a heart ; then, with the aid of a thorn, drew blood-drops from Hoa-Lan's arm. With this blood she inscribed a magical formula on the fragment, making a charm—called in Annam a "*cai-bùa*"—which she buried in the ground.

The witch muttered what seemed an incantation, and disappeared.

II

Hoa-Lan returned to her dwelling, but knew not an instant's repose. As soon as her eyelids closed the witch's frightful form appeared, and the maiden wondered, terror-struck, what would be the result of the *cai-bùa*.

And lo, one day, while walking in the sombre woods, Mùn-Cay was suddenly transformed into a superb ebony-tree. Hoa-

The Orchid

Lan witnessed the portent from afar, and stood stupefied.

The *con-tinh* appeared, chuckling.

“Behold, my beauty ! thy lover henceforth will never be faithless ! . . . Art thou content ?”

“Ah, wicked witch, what hast thou done ? Give me back him I love, or let me vanish from the face of the earth !”

The witch replied by a burst of laughter, which sounded like a cracked bell ; then “evaporated,” leaving as her trace a strong smell of sulphur.

Hoa-Lan fell on her knees by the ebony-tree. Her eyes were drowned in tears, and her sobs, swelled by the wailing of the wind, repeated by all the forest echoes, filled the sonorous air with sadness unspeakable.

She entwined the trunk with her white arms ; her supple body was bowed ; her dishevelled hair trailed on the ground.

“Forgive me, my well-beloved !” cried the hapless woman ; “forgive me for draw-

The Orchid

ing down on thee the witch's evil spell ! . . .
Speak one word, O Mùn-Cay, one single
word of pity !

“ Behold, I crawl at thy feet like the
guilty hound who craves a caress.

“ Hearest thou not ? Wilt remain deaf
to my sorrow and my remorse ? ”

The miraculous tree answered nothing,
and Hoa-Lan bewailed herself yet more
woefully.

Hours passed, night came ; then yet more
days, and yet more nights.

At last a genie, who passed that way,
was moved by her misery.

He touched Hoa-Lan with his forefinger,
saying :

“ Woman, thou hast wrought much woe
with thy wiles ; but sorrow has purified thy
soul. Thou art forgiven. Thou shalt die,
therefore, as thou desirest, for the torment
of hapless love ends only with life. ’Twere
cruel to leave thee to so wretched an exist-
ence.

The Orchid

“ Nevertheless, thou shalt serve as a warning to other women . . . to those who, in coming days, will be light-minded and vain.

“ Thou shalt become a flower, but a strange flower, strange as were thy garments, thine adornments, and the fashion of thy hair. Beholding thee, they will recognize thy capricious and changeful spirit, thy perpetual concern for elegance.

“ Women will love thee, O Hoa-Lan, for they cherish all singular things.

“ Few will be wise enough to profit by the woeful experience thou hast undergone.

“ I behold them without number, those who, as the centuries pass, will be cruel and fickle, those whose joy will be redoubled by the tears they have forced to flow.

“ Yet some that I behold will become thoughtful when thy story is told them.

“ They will have pity on the pain they have caused.

“ Chaste women there will be, dreading coquetry's dangerous charms, who will

The Orchid

choose the wild grace of the sensitive-plant rather than thy sinister brilliance.

“They shall be happy ; womanly happiness is a hidden happiness ; the shadow of the hearth is needful that it may flourish.”

Thus spoke the genie “who knows all.” Hoa-Lan became an orchid.

Her *cai-ào* of purple paled exquisitely to mauve. Her eyes took on the tint of gold, her flesh that of amber.

Her flexible arms twined round the ebony-tree, as though in eternal—and most useless !—supplication.

The Annamite women, those who believe in the supernatural power of the *genii*, stay modestly by the fireside.

They prefer calm, family joys to noisy pleasures, to the loud-voiced fame of the fair woman who makes herself a show. . . .

This, lady, is the legend of the orchid.

XXVIII

THE POOL OF PICE

(To My Daughter)

THE glassy water was iridescent with the opal tints of the sky, and the grey mists that veiled the liquid surface, fleeing before the dawn, were pierced by the summits of bamboo and areca-tree.

Snipe came, in reddish covey, to settle and refresh themselves on the banks of the mere; a frog of emerald-hue leapt with wide-spread feet, and vanished amid concentric ripples.

And then Yéû made his appearance, driving his black buffaloes.

A sorry, sickly soul was he, flat-nosed, with ashen face.

His eyes were very fine, though brimming with melancholy, or wandering with fear.

The Pool of Pice

His fleshless arms looked disproportionately long. His shrunken chest, his uneven shoulders, were piteous to behold.

Yéû was indeed unhappy ; his own mother loved him not !

He was the last-born of a numerous family. All his brothers and sisters were handsome and well-made. He alone, being so ill-shapen, shamed the beldame who gave him birth.

On poor Yéû were heaped hard drudgery and repulsive tasks, and the boy submitted without complaint.

He never smiled. He knew nothing of the sports enjoyed by boys of his own age, and often he went hungry.

If he ever bewailed himself, his mother and brothers beat him, and his sisters jeered.

It was long since Yéû had ceased to complain. He became a great philosopher, greeting grief and joy with unmoved soul.

“ An hour of joy, added to an hour of grief, are two hours the less for thee to live, ’

The Pool of Pice

This maxim had been taught him, as a rich reward, by a blind man whom Yéû had led to the right path ; and Yéû knew that brief life is even as fugitive as water-drops on the leaf of the lotus.

One day when hunger made itself felt more cruelly than its wont, Yéû sought some means of appeasing it. He drank of the mere's brackish waters, and was sickened ; he unearthed some roots, whose bitterness sharpened his appetite. Unable to hold out longer, he pulled down a meal of bananas, and ate with all his might.

All at once a "wild man" with streaming hair sprang from the neighbouring thicket. With outcries and blows he demonstrated that, the bananas being his property, Yéû was a robber liable to the punishment of the *cangue* (collar).

Yéû wept, and besought the furious "wild man," who became calm, but made the child promise not to renew his innocent theft.

From that day forth, Yéû kept his

The Pool of Pice

buffaloes in sorrowful resignation. And yet . . . and yet were there not, somewhere in the world, happy beings who never hungered?

Rich people, who purchased pigs, poultry, and fruit? Whence had they the money needful for such purchases?

What had he done to the gods, he, poor Yéû, to be thus denuded of the things necessary for life?

Yéû had got thus far in his reflections, under that divine dawn.

All at once the sky grew resplendent. The purple veil was riven and rent, and the Planet God appeared.

The child held up prayerful hands. "O Sun!" he cried with a sob, "O Sun, all made of gold, take pity on me!"

"Thou, O Sun, art so rich, and I so poor! So poor that I cannot feed myself, and give a little rice in alms to the wanderer who begs a share of my repast!"

"Give me one of thy beams . . . the

The Pool of Pice

smallest of all . . . and I vow to thee that never will I leave my neighbour in need . . . that I will be bountiful even as thou art !

“Thou givest the sap to the plant, thou givest the plants to the animals . . . to me who am well-nigh a man, thou hast never given aught.

“Forget me no longer, O Sun ! Very great is my hunger !”

The sun seemed to smile till all the horizon glowed. A long shaft of gold pierced a rosy cloud, and fell at the feet of the dazzled Yéû.

The lad knelt down in the grass moist with the dew of night, and gathered up . . . a new-minted coin !

The sun had given him alms !

Yéû turned the coin over and over in his fingers. What should he do with it ?

He calculated. For this coin, one might have rice . . . or bananas, those pretty amber bananas that the women carry to market in their flat baskets . . . or brown

The Pool of Pice

kakis, milky manioc, fish-broth, maize biscuits, or millet cakes. . . .

For the first time in his life, Yéû laughed aloud. The unwonted noise scared his buffaloes, and set them prancing.

The birds flew away on outspread wings. A hyena in the forest mimicked this uncalled-for mirth ; and, none can tell whence, a very old woman made her appearance.

Her hands shook ; her dirty white hair, soaked with sweat, was stuck to her hollow temples.

She went up to Yéû, held out her ragged *cai-ào*, and said : “ I am hungry ! ”

The boy’s beautiful eyes fixed themselves on her wrinkles, and filled with tears.

Was she not yet more luckless than he ? Yéû was rich, since the sun had given him a coin. . . . Should he not be merciful in his turn ?

With perfect simplicity, he handed the coin to the old woman.

Away in the woods the horrible hyena

The Pool of Pice

chuckled again . . . and Yéû felt the claws of hunger tearing his bowels more sharply.

He lay down on the ground, and sought solace in slumber for his sufferings.

He slept long. When he awoke, the sun was sinking behind the mountain.

A coronet of his last beams was glorifying the heavens. . . . Yéû rubbed his eyes. Doubtless he was still dreaming !

Was it possible that the morning miracle was to be renewed ?

From each ray of the solar crown darted an arrow, which fell into the resplendent mere.

Yéû arose, stupefied ; his buffaloes were swimming in liquid gold !

In a voice hoarse with emotion, Yéû called to his herd. They came to him, bearing, caught in their fells, innumerable glistening coins.

Yéû gathered some up, and threw back the others into the mere, that he might find them later to serve his needs.

The Pool of Pice

Henceforth Yéû was rich. The reality surpassed his dreams. Never more need he go hungry; and, did he give alms to all the poor of Annam, he could never succeed in exhausting his treasure. . . .

The seller of soup passed by. Yéû devoured the whole of the victuals heaped on the triple lacquer tray. . . .

A genial warmth made his limbs supple, and gave colour to his ashen face.

So greatly was he transformed that the beldame dared not scold him for his tardiness when he brought home his buffaloes, his brothers refrained from beating him, and his sisters forgot to mock.

Yéû grew a strong and vigorous man. He sang nowadays as he went to the miraculous mere.

His family were amazed at the change, and sought to discover its cause.

At first this was no easy matter. Now he was rich, Yéû became circumspect. But his health, indeed, seemed miraculous!

The Pool of Pice

The doled-out rations diminished, and Yéû fattened visibly. His earthy skin became clear and shining, his round cheeks expanded, even as the cheeks of a Buddhist idol.

They followed him, spied on him, and discovered his secret ; they learnt the existence of the treasure hidden under the glassy waters.

Oh, joy ! 'Twould be easy, it seemed, to go forth in the dark night, and seize on pice past all number !

The beldame, followed by her children, betook herself to the magic mere.

Like vultures, they fought beforehand over their prey. Brother struck sister, sister scratched brother ; each would fain be first in casting the nets that were to be filled with pice. 'Twas a fine battle !

The family, almost intact, reached the enchanted banks.

The mere slept ; no night-breeze wrinkled its stagnant waters.

The Pool of Pice

The silence was uneasy, Nature as dead.

Then mother, brothers, and sisters cast in their nets. . . .

Those nets grew heavy. . . . With unheard-of toil they drew them out into the high grass.

All night they laboured, with hands flayed by the slippery ropes, with loins aching beneath the weight of their burdens, now heaped upon the bank.

And behold, dawn once again tinted with opal the glassy surface. . . . Day appeared and the sun showed his kingly brow. . . .

Ah, how the sun laughed that day! How he mocked the wicked niggards!

The gold of the night was changed into muddy pebbles. An acrid odour of stirred-up mire stank on the air; and, with livid faces and features drawn with fatigue, the robbers robbed stared one on another in fury and consternation.

.
The pool of pice still exists. He who

The Pool of Pice

would win any particle of the treasure it hides must needs be good and pure.

He must love his less happy neighbour, and give charitably from a sincere and self-sacrificing heart.

If you possess all these good qualities, go to the pool of pice ; but forget not that the least taint of selfishness or greed may change the gold into mire.

So it is very hard to make one's fortune by casting one's nets into the Annamite waters !

XXIX

SOUSSYAMA

AFTER the midday sleep we went up to the pagoda.

The old bonze, a man of delicate learning, received us with the exquisite courtesy of the Far East.

First he made us admire his great buddhas — Sakya-Muni, Huyen-Thiên, Amida . . . the six genii who are judges in Hell, the sacred tablets, the silks embroidered in honour of heroes, a curious picture immortalizing a knight of the Tam-Quoc period who, with one sword-stroke, cut through at once his enemy and his mount.

Next the bonze gave us tea. We went through the gardens, delicious both in coolness and scent. The burning gold of Indian pinks harmonized with the blue of the great

Soussyama

vases. In the gracefully curved ponds, the green water slumbered beneath the lotus. Amid gigantic banyans, close to a monumental portal of varnished brick, a tree with huge many-coloured blossoms happened to catch my eye.

I knew that tree, very common in India, but somewhat rare in Annam.

The bonze assured me I was not mistaken ; it was really a soussyama, which a wandering Brahmin had planted there "several generations" ago.

The boys served us with tea in silver-edged cups, and while we tasted the hot, amber liquid, the bonze told us the story of the singular tree.

When the *girdar* Kampour had left the Five Sacred Springs for ever, he took up his abode on the flowery banks of the Ganges. He chose a pleasing site, amidst which he made his servants build, first a shelter, and then a palace.

In this palace, a wonder of architecture, a marble jewel, he placed a rarer wonder, a jewel yet more precious—the Princess Ranée.

No sooner had Agni, the sacred fire, consumed the sacrificial victims, than Kampour proclaimed that his dynasty was founded; and, before the great entrance-gate, he planted with his own hands a young tree of sinewy, slender shaft.

The Princess Ranée gave birth in succession to seven sons.

From the trunk of the young tree, now grown thicker, seven boughs sprang forth, sustaining a mass of luxuriant verdure.

One night the Princess had a dream. She thought that a flower was growing at the summit of the great tree. In the morning all men admiringly beheld a bud full of promise amid the confusion of shining leaves.

Ranée knew she was, for the eighth time, to be a mother.

Soussyama

She bore a daughter, ideally fair, with silken locks.

A rich white blossom then was born.

They called the flower and the little Princess by the same name: Soussyama.

The good Princess Ranée had some happy years ; then, one eve, as he sank to the horizon, the Sun bore away her soul.

Soussyama grew a wilful Princess, who ruled all in the great palace of lace-work.

Kampour, who adored her, satisfied every one of her fancies. She wore garments whiter than the snow, more glittering than the stars.

Huge diamonds decked her silken hair.

The maiden's one friend was Sahiba—Sahiba the sweet, Sahiba with the heavenly heart and speech of honey.

One day there came to the palace a young Prince of great beauty, Damao.

He was preceded and followed by a numerous escort of servants. Clad in broidered silks, he descended with grace and

Soussyama

majesty from his palanquin, and saluted Soussyama.

The old Kampour was dying. Nevertheless he received Damao with joy, Damao, that noble Prince, twice-born, of the mighty Kshatrya¹ caste, and spoke of giving him Soussyama in marriage.

Damao stayed in the marble palace. He was there yet when Kampour expired, but did not hasten to take the illustrious spouse who was destined for him.

Ere she lay down on her scented couch, Soussyama, every night, invoked the gods of love :

“ O Kamâ ! ” she cried, stretching forth her marvellous naked arms, weighted with heavy bracelets : “ Kamâ, son of mighty Vishnu, thou that at thy will dost consume our mortal hearts, light in Damao the burning flame of desire, the victorious flame of love.

“ O Lakshmî ! eternal beauty and sublime, lend thy servant Soussyama the

¹ A warrior-caste, ranking next to the priestly.

Soussyama

grace and charm that is thine own, that she may enslave him whom she loves even to death ! ”

Alas ! The proud Soussyama, though so fair, troubled not Damao’s heart ; for that heart was filled with an angel image : Sahiba.

Each morning, ere the sun gave heat to the world, Damao betook himself to the banks of the Ganges ; each morning Sahiba went to bathe her luminous body in the beneficent waters.

The beauty of the sweet young maiden had won the Prince’s heart for ever.

Soussyama loved Damao more and yet more. Her splendid brows knit together when she beheld his indifference towards her. . . .

For the first time in her life she knew sorrow, when Djabal her brother, who loved Sahiba, declared to her that he would hurl from the walls the audacious Prince who was robbing him of his beloved.

Soussyama wept ; but, trusting in her

alluring powers, she soothed Djabal, and defended Damao, whom she meant to conquer.

Djabal waited, hoping he had deceived himself; but slumber fled far from his couch.

Night and day he went wandering in the palace and about the gardens, that he might spy on Damao.

Soussyama was cruelly tormented, but she wept not.

The flower grew yellow with jealousy.

One morning at dawn, Damao fain would aid Sahiba to issue from the waves.

Bashfully the virgin repulsed him, veiling her bosom with crossed hands.

Despite her agitation, her eyes responded to the tender, imperious love which blazed in those of the Prince.

Damao spoke out; he would have Sahiba for his wife.

Sahiba, who had clothed herself in light muslins, listened to his fiery words.

She also loved; she accepted her

Soussyama

destiny. . . . Embracing the Prince's head with her cool arms, she printed a pure caress on his ravished eyes.

Djabal was about to spring, and strike ; but Soussyama still held him back.

.

In the great marble palace, Sahiba lay stark and lifeless.

Her blood reddened the rosy pavement.

Her heavenly face was yet sweeter than its wont, illumined by a radiant smile ; for Sahiba died beloved !

In the torment of her jealousy, Soussyama the tyrant had struck down her rival.

Blood had sprung forth on the garment of snows and stars.

All in vain Soussyama sought to cleanse herself of the avenging stain. . . . It grew, it increased, till it covered her from head to foot.

Soussyama lived in mortal anguish, knowing rest no more.

Her sin was to her as a garment, remorse as a covering.

Soussyama

Red were her robes, red her hands, and red her feet.

Maddened with fear, she seized her bodkin, and opened her veins.

The splendid blossom is purpled all.

And ever since, from Colombo to Delhi, from the Indus to the Ganges, those weird soussyama flowers are born stainless, and turn yellow as they open, to die at last in a garb of blood ; thus decking the mighty trees, of wry and wrinkled trunk, with many-coloured blossoms.

The night wind shook the banana-leaves with a soft rustling as of rumped silks ; the setting sun painted the pagoda-garden with the gorgeous hue of blood.

All things seemed of a sudden shadowed with a slight crimson veil—the veil of Soussyama.

We thanked the bonze, and bade him farewell.

XXX

THEY WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY

THEY are held in special honour who died for the land of Annam.

Their remembrance lives yet in the minds of men; their names are graven on the pagoda stones, on the gold, the silver, the jade of the precious tablets.

Their forefathers were ennobled.

They who died for their country were venerated even as gods.

It seems as though Destiny stamped the land of Nam-Việt with the dolorous seal of servitude.

Despite its old-time glory, the Annamite race had constantly to struggle against foreign domination, the bloody yoke of enemy factions, and the scarcely less heavy

They who Died for their Country

one of absolute despots, striving harshly for the people's welfare.

Dynasty succeeded dynasty only by means of revolt and murder.

And perpetually, well-nigh periodically, the ancestral enemy, the Chinese, weighed down the country of the Giao-Chi with his burdensome domination.

The General Mâ-Vien, and Mâ-Tong after him, set up four bronze columns in the land of Annam. These columns bore the following inscription :

“ When I fall, the Annamite race will be blotted out.”

The conquered race “kept up” the famous columns until the day came when they found themselves sufficiently strong to resume the struggle.

Those who raised the standard of revolt were honoured for their courage. All men followed it, forced into heroism by the military law, strange as implacable, which enacted that the wounded be cared for if

They who Died for their Country

“struck in front,” but beheaded if “wounded behind.”

They who died to secure peace and freedom for their brethren were held up as examples to future generations. They rank with the protecting genii, and almost always have their special pagodas.

The earliest was possibly Ong-than-giong, possibly Ly-ong-than the giant—heroes, demi-gods, or incarnations of genii.

The former, before re-ascending to heaven, let fall his gigantic steel buckler set with emeralds, which was immediately transformed into a brilliant lake, surrounded by trees eternally green.

One fact is certain in this vague legend—that of the heroic death of Ly-công-Dat, conquered by the Chinese (111 B.C.). He slew himself by the Lake of Ngu’u-Dam.

Among the heroes—the *thâns*—may be mentioned Trung-Trac, of the Lac-de-Phong family, wife of a functionary of Chau-Dzien. In A.D. 39, Trung - Trac,

They who Died for their Country

with the help of her young sister Nhi, reassembled an army and attacked To-Dinh, the Chinese governor of the Giao-Chi.

They are the famous “Ladies” celebrated in legend.

Trung-Trac, who is honoured in various pagodas, reigned for three years, was vanquished by Mâ-Vien, and committed suicide.

Among the *thâns* may also be found Phuong-Hung, a “man of the woods,” who headed a rebellion in 784.

Also the Captains Dinh-nghe, Nho-quiem, Bô-lanh, and Lé-Hanh, who revolted successfully against the Chinese rule.

There is besides Triên-tu-Long, who conquered alone the troops of the Tâo, attacked in the van by Ha-hau-Don, in the rear by Ha-hau-An. He was victor in seventy-two battles, slew with his own hand fifty-two hostile chiefs, and fell at last “only through treason.”¹

¹ M. G. Dumontier.

They who Died for their Country

In 1412, the new Chinese laws interdicting "the blackening of the teeth, the chewing of betel, and the dressing of the hair in a knot, etc.," were received with outcries of rage by the Annamites.

Lê-Loï came forward as champion of independence. He was seconded by Nguyễn-Tiên, ancestor of the present kings.

Lê-Loï, the conqueror of the Tartars, and endowed by the gods with a miraculous sword, possesses great legendary fame and numerous pagodas.

Pagodas also exist in honour of Quang-Phù, vanquisher of the Chinese general Duong-San, who built a citadel near Mount Chau-Son.

It was, however, chiefly during the Tam-Quoc period that marvellous deeds of daring abounded.

It would be wearisome to relate at length the legends of every *thôn*. The glorious catalogue culminates in the suicide of Nguyễn-tri-Phu'ong, who, wounded and

They who Died for their Country

imprisoned by the French, let himself perish of hunger; and that, no less touching, of Hoang-Ru'ou', governor of Hanoi, who, when the citadel was taken by our troops (1873), hanged himself on Mount Tam-Son.

Temples were raised to their memory.

In one of those temples, the Pagoda of the Mares, it is curious to find a tablet celebrating the valour of the Breton sailor Emmanuel, as protecting genii of Annam.

Nguyễn-An (Emperor Gia-Long) honoured in this way the brave man who fought for him against the Tay-Son, and perished in the burning of the junk he commanded (1777).¹

In a collection of Annamite legends, I think it indispensable to mention the heroic deed of one *thần*; a deed transformed into miracle by the enthusiastic and superstitious imagination of the populace.

¹ History of Annam, by the Abbé Launay.

XXXI

THE CITIZEN OF CU-LAC

THIS happened during the time of war between the Trinh and the Nguyễn.

The hostile hosts confronted each other every day. In both camps were performed rash and incredible deeds of daring.

Numerous were the dead, the wounded past all counting. Very few were punished by beheading ; 'twas a war of heroes.

The shafts fell from the sky like a shower of shooting-stars ; the Torrent of Chay ran red as the Song-Koï ; the war-cries of the combatants, beating against the precipices of the Peak of Len, reverberated far and wide through the land.

The captains shook on high their huge bucklers, whereon were painted most hideous faces, in hopes of frightening the foe. . . .

The Citizen of Cu-lac

On the one side as on the other men had implored the protection of the genii.

Every day, from dawn till dusk, Nguyễn-qui-Lâng, the Citizen of Cu-lac, fought like a tiger. He leapt like the nimble lord, he howled even as he. His lance pierced through bodies and tore out bowels. He was covered with his enemies' blood, the finest trophy, indeed, which a warrior may boast.

The instant he appeared he struck terror into the Trinh host; but he roused besides a fresh outburst of heroism, and the fight was resumed yet more fiercely.

One of the Trinh captains had sworn to vanquish this formidable foe.

He was brave, this captain, strong, and skilful. With a back-handed stroke, he was wont to cut off a head. His enemies specially feared him, for those he slew appeared to have been shamefully beheaded. . . . And were it not piteous to do a brave man's duty, only to be—through this horrible

The Citizen of Cu-lac

injury—confounded with the fugitives?—
to have deserved the heroes' paradise, yet be
hurled into the Hell of the Ma-cut-troc,¹
doomed to wander through all eternity,
seeking repose in vain?

The heat was overwhelming; the sun
blazed into the face of the valiant Nguyễn.

The captain of the Trinh went to measure
his strength against him. Long did they
battle, equal in strength as in skill.

Nguyễn-qui-Lâng dealt furious blows,
which the captain parried with his steel
buckler.

All at once, this cunning captain perceived that Nguyễn blinked his eyes whenever the sun made the brilliant buckler sparkle.

He profited by this circumstance and his own advantageous position.

He executed a fantastic windmill whirl; the buckler shot forth lightnings, and

¹ Shortened spirits, wandering souls of the decapitated.

The Citizen of Cu-lac

Nguyên, for well-nigh a minute, was forced to close his eyes.

The captain took advantage of that minute, and swiftly cut off the head of the Citizen of Cu-lac.

A vast outcry of terror rang from the Nguyên host. There was a moment of sheer bewilderment. The soldiers gave back, and panic was at hand, for all now doubted the genii who had permitted their best warrior to be "shamefully" slain.

The power of the genii should never be doubted ; for this they did for Nguyên-qui-Lâng.

At the very moment when the Trinh captain was exulting over his victory, Nguyên stooped down, took up his head, placed it under his arm, and, seizing his long sword, plunged it into his enemy's heart.

The warriors resumed the fight with fresh fury ; and that day they were victorious.

The Citizen of Cu-lac

Nguyên went down to the Torrent of Chay, still bearing his head beneath his arm.

As he passed through the village, the women surrounded him, scared and sobbing.

He paused, for he saw among them his wife, whose sorrow was "boundless as the seas."

"O woman!" said he, "weep not, for thy spouse will die for his country, and that is great honour for our ancestors."

"But, O my spouse! how shall thy poor soul find eternal rest, since thy head hath been cut off?"

"I am in pain; increase not my woe, but rather pray the genie to help me!"

The woman invoked the Mighty One. Suddenly inspired, she set Nguyên's head upright on his bleeding shoulders.

Immediately the head stuck fast. And, while the wife rejoiced to behold her husband "in good health," the hero said to her:

"This is no hour to utter cries of glee; not yet is our country at peace!"

The Citizen of Cu-lac

“Moreover,” continued Nguyễn, “methinks a man whose head is cut off should not stubbornly persist in living. . . . Since I am assured of celestial glory, let me depart!”

Thus speaking, he laid himself down beside the way, and his soul took its flight to the paradise of heroes.

A ghé-miêu was built on that glorious spot.

Such is the legend of Nguyễn-qui-Lang.

It was told me by Phù-Io in the very place where the Citizen of Cu-lac was wounded, and miraculously healed “to die in glory.”

History relates that Nguyễn, as he lay on the battlefield, saw his warriors give way. Despite his fearful wounds, he rose up, and went to contend with the hostile chieftain, whom he slew. This deed accomplished, the hero had, ere he died, the joy of beholding his own army's brilliant success.

.

The Citizen of Cu-lac

The intrepid aviator, Do-hu, and the other Annamites fallen on the soil of France, have given proof that patriotic traditions live yet in the heart of the race.

They poured out their blood for the great nation their protectress with the same enthusiasm as though defending the soil of the Giao-Chi.

All hail to the brave !

May they be honoured even as were the heroic *thâns* !

Be their names graven in the book of glory, even as are graven on gold and on the pagoda stones the names of their ancestors who died for the honour of the Dragon !

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